



H. A. Shaw

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Y O U N G L O V E ;

A NOVEL

BY

MRS. TROLLOPE.

AUTHOR OF "THE FORD OF WILKINELL," "THE BARNARD IN
AMERICA," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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Y O U N G L O V E.

CHAPTER I.

“DANS le pays des aveugles, les borgnes sont rois.” Happy is the man who, wishing to live and die in the aromatic odour of country greatness, yet possessing but a moderate estate, has his acres situated in a neighbourhood where there is no dukery.

Colonel William Henry Dermont, of THE MOUNT, was a happy man ; for in this very essential particular he was blest beyond the common lot of English country gentlemen, having neither duke, marquis,

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earl, viscount, baron, baronet, nay, not even a knight, within many miles of him ; and with a snug, well-wooded little estate, producing at easy rents very little less than four thousand a year, he knew himself to be, by far, the greatest man in the neighbourhood, and that, too, without having to do battle for the pre-eminence either at assizes, sessions, or rail-road meetings.

The Mount was situated in a parish called Stoke, but respecting the name of the county I shall be silent—for how many might I not offend by naming any county, with a statement annexed, setting forth that there was a part of it where, for many miles, there was not such a thing as a nobleman's seat to be seen !

The Mount, however, was a very nice, comfortable, pretty place, with plenty of wood and water around it, and built moreover, with every suitable accommodation for a family possessed of such a revenue as I have mentioned, but without any out-of-the-common-way extravagances in stables,

dog-kennels, and pineries, demanding every day of the year greater expenditure than it is at all times convenient to make. The soil was kindly, and grateful for the care bestowed upon it, producing good returns of corn and butter, fruit and flowers. What could any reasonable man or woman wish for more ?

I do not believe that either Colonel Dermont or his wife did wish for any thing more. They were, indeed, of that happily-born class of people, who are inclined to think that every thing they possess is a good deal better than any thing of the same kind possessed by any body else. This is certainly a most desirable temperament, as far as relates to the parties who possess it ; but it may occasionally be found a little fatiguing to the spirits of others, as it causes their conversation to be rather too much in the same key. But in no other respect could the most envious individuals of their acquaintance find any reason to complain of

this happy peculiarity. In no degree could they be reasonably considered as unusually stiff or stately in their demeanour, or in any way overbearing or morose in their conscious superiority. The very worst that could be said of them was, that they were fully aware of their many advantages over the majority of their fellow-creatures, and that they enjoyed, with a good deal of relish, the happiness of believing that they held rather an elevated place in creation. It must be a very ill-tempered being who could find fault with this.

They had been married, at the time my narrative begins, rather more than six years, and had scarcely ever had any dispute whatever, much less any disagreement which could deserve the name of a quarrel. This proves, beyond all possibility of doubt, that they were both good-tempered people—and so, indeed, they were ; but besides being good-tempered, they really did think wonderfully alike upon all subjects, so that, to say

the truth, it would have been by no means easy for them to have found any thing to quarrel about.

They had but one child ; luckily, however, this was a boy, and certainly, without exaggeration, one of the finest that ever was born. He was exceedingly handsome, and very intelligent ; and although at times a little headstrong and whimsical, which his nurse thought might probably be owing to his being rather more indulged than other children, he had a generous and affectionate temper, which most people seemed to think atoned for his naughtiness.

But what was of even greater consequence than either his beauty, his intelligence, or his good temper, he was very strong and healthy, so that there was no danger that the Mount and its appurtenances should pass away from the race. Perhaps, though they never did appear to think themselves unfortunate in any thing, and, in fact, never spoke upon this particular subject at all, they might have been

as well pleased had heaven given them two or three more children, for Mrs. Dermont had a pretty little fortune of fifteen thousand pounds, which was settled upon "younger children," and the not having any younger children at all, made this settlement seem abortive. But although some such thoughts might, during the first years of their marriage, have produced a feeling somewhat resembling regret, it was neither very strong nor very lasting, and the well-satisfied father and mother soon found that there was no difficulty whatever in pouring forth all the paternal love that it was possible human hearts could feel, upon one. The want of a daughter was, moreover, in some degree supplied by the presence of a little orphan girl, who had been thrown upon their protection and kindness under very interesting circumstances.

When Colonel Dermont was quite a young man, he had insisted, like a good many other quite young men, upon being permitted to put on a red coat ; a favour

which was granted to him very reluctantly, and which probably would never have been granted to him at all, had the disagreeable result of the young gentleman's being sent to India been contemplated. To India, however, he went ; and most assuredly would never have lived to come back again and take possession of the Mount, had it not been for the timely aid of a brother officer, who, seeing him hard pushed, galloped to his side exactly in time to save his life.

Major Drummond, the gallant officer who performed this service for him, did not survive it long ; for a wound, received in the same action, though not fatal at the time, caused his death, after a lingering confinement of three or four months.

During this melancholy interval, he was attended as assiduously by Colonel Dermont as by his miserable wife ; and soon after his death, the grateful young man had the melancholy satisfaction of being greatly useful to his widow, by attending her and her young daughter to England.

Had the young lady, who was just seventeen, been less of an invalid upon the voyage, it is probable that the young gentleman would have fallen in love with her, for she was a very charming creature; but destiny had decided otherwise for them; and although Miss Drummond, when well enough to appear at all, constantly found the handsome Colonel Dermont at her side, the intercourse between them consisted wholly in acts of the most thoughtful and kind-hearted attention on the part of the young officer, and of something very like motherly and sisterly affection towards him, on the part of the widow and orphan in return.

Colonel Dermont married within a few months after his return to England, the early loss of both his parents having put him in possession of his estate; and the friendship of his kind-hearted wife proved a source of great, and, alas! of greatly-needed comfort to his unfortunate India friends.

Four years after the marriage of Colonel

Dermont, Miss Drummond followed his example, and became, for a few months, the happy wife of a not very wealthy, but very worthy clergyman of the same race and name. But this happy union was dissolved by the sudden death of Mr. Drummond, and within a year after it had taken place, an infant grand-daughter was the only earthly source of consolation left to the unhappy widow of Major Drummond; for her daughter did not survive its birth an hour.

The interval of sorrow and sickness which followed was but short, the heart-broken widow soon followed, and the orphan babe was consigned to the guardianship of Colonel Dermont, and the maternal kindness of his wife, before she had completed her third year.

The little Julia, of course, became immediately an inmate at "the Mount," and the nursery establishment for the two children was as completely the same, as if they had indeed been the offspring of the same parents. The fortune of the little orphan girl did not

much exceed the moderate amount of seven thousand pounds; and her good guardian and his wife pleased themselves by the thought, that her long minority, although by her grandmother's will, she was to be of age at seventeen, would make a very respectable addition to this little sum, provided the proceeds were carefully hoarded for her. Never had Colonel Dermont forgotten the moment of peril, in which the arm of his little ward's gallant grandfather saved his life, and the watching over her, and her little fortune, was a source of constant pleasure to him.

But, notwithstanding these amiable sentiments on his part, and very truly sympathetic feelings of no less amiable a quality on that of his wife, they could neither of them ever bring themselves to forget that the fine, noble-looking Alfred was their own child, and that the *chétive* little Julia was not. This difference, however, was not such as in any degree to injure the little girl, or interfere with her happiness. It only made her feel,

indeed, that although she was as gay and as happy as the petted dog, Bingo, himself, she was of no more consequence than he; a conviction which brought no pain with it, nor ever caused her for a moment to wish that she was as important a personage as Alfred—nay, it may be doubted if she would ever, even in the moments when he was the most indulged, have consented to change with him. She was a quick little thing, and of so gay and happy a temperament, that as soon as she began to think at all, she made up her mind to believe, that though only a little girl, (which, of course, she knew was but a very second-rate sort of animal in creation,) she was the best off of the two—inasmuch, as she was permitted to trot here and there, according to her own whim and will, while the idolised Alfred was watched through every moment of the day, as if the welfare of the universe depended upon his not being too hot nor too cold, too fasting nor too fed, too much in movement, or too much at rest.

As to Alfred himself, he was by no means dull enough not to perceive how remarkably exalted a place he occupied in the estimation of human beings in general ; and by the time he was eight years old, he was as fully aware that there was nobody in the house of so much importance as himself, as ever Samuel Johnson felt, when inhabiting the mansion of Mrs. Thrale. This was a very great misfortune, and the beautiful boy was not likely to pass through life without suffering from it.

CHAPTER II.

OF course, if not absolutely impossible, it is at least very highly improbable, that any family in possession of an estate more than double in amount of rent-roll, to that of any other body within a dozen miles of them, should have many near neighbours with whom they can associate on terms of perfect equality. This is not to be hoped for ; and there may be some persons, perhaps, who may think that it is not to be wished ; but be this as it may, in the case of our excellent Colonel and Mrs. Dermont, although they had the advantage of several friendly and agreeable neighbours, there was not one who was not deemed by all the others, second in

importance, and at a considerable distance, to "the charming family at the Mount."

That Colonel and Mrs. Dermont subscribed to this classification is most certain, but it is equally so, that they did this with as little departure from amiable feeling on their own part, as possible, and with a more complete absence of every look, word, act, or even gesticulation, which could produce a painful effect upon their neighbours, than can reasonably be expected, in one case out of five hundred, among persons similarly situated.

In short, the Dermonts were very highly esteemed, respected, and liked ; nay, there were one or two individuals in the neighbourhood, who were conscious of some little importance themselves, who did not scruple to say, they "loved them dearly," and the Dermonts in return, appeared to have a very great regard for almost every body. They never gave less than two very handsome dinners every month ; not to mention the invariable rule which they laid down for

themselves of having the principal members of about half a dozen families who lived too far off for conveniently returning home after dinner, to stay with them for three days at a time during the summer, and three days at a time during the winter of every year.

These were duties of hospitality which they would have thought it almost as great a sin to omit, as the weekly donations of milk and vegetables in summer, soup and coals in winter, and as much physic as they chose all the year round, to the poor of their own parish.

Neither were these duties of hospitality performed with regularity only, they were performed well also. The dinners (considering that they had only a female artist) were pretty nearly as good as dinners beyond *fourgon* reach of either London or Paris could be. There was a pianoforte always in very tolerable tune, for the use of young ladies, when they were of the singing and playing class; there were always two Books of Beauty of the current year on the draw-

ing room table; in winter there was always a very good fire, and in summer there were always abundance of flowers—and then there was always Alfred to be looked at.

Nor were the preparations for the staying company less perfect. The admirable rule laid down by Sir Walter, was always strictly adhered to—there was the “the rest day, the dressed day, and the pressed day.” On the first, Mrs. Dermont herself never failed to accompany each lady guest to her chamber, when she retired to make her toilet for dinner, reminding her where the bell was that would bring her maid with hot water from the house-keeper’s room, and where that which would summon her from the regions above—she never failed on these occasions to say, “you must not give yourself any trouble about dressing to-day. We shall have nobody but our good clergyman. To morrow we hope to get some friends to meet you.” On the second day the young ladies were recommended, if the weather were favourable, to walk in the wilderness,

not only because they would find shade, but because they would have no rough paths to encounter; and the old ladies were invited to look at the conservatory. For the gentlemen, old and young, there were fishing-rods in spring and summer, and guns in the autumn and winter, not to mention battledore and shuttlecock, and the billiard-table all the year round. On the third day both the colonel and his lady declared that their guests must not think of going, for that their kind neighbours the *A*'s and the *B*'s; and, if it were fine, the *C*'s and the *D*'s also, were all coming up in the evening, and perhaps they might get up a little dance or play charades—and, moreover, Alfred had been promised that he should stay up as long as he liked;—positively they must not go. And all this was done and said with so much condescending kindness, that it was quite impossible not to declare that the Dermonts were certainly the most delightful people in the world—a perfect blessing to the neighbourhood in general, and most particularly so to “those

who were intimate with them," which of course was a happiness that a good many laid claim to.

This annual routine went on with wonderful regularity for many years, the only, or at least the principal irregularity in it arising from the greater or less degree, in which Alfred mixed himself with the guests. It cannot be doubted that in a house so every way agreeable as the Mount, the words and the smiles, nay, even the cuffs and the kicks which the young heir condescended to bestow upon the company, were ever received with delight. Nor, as the young gentleman grew older, were the gratifications derived from his society confined to these varying caresses; for sometimes he would endearingly fix himself upon some highly-favoured individual, follow him or her, as it might happen to be, from room to room throughout the house, insist upon sharing the chair of the flattered guest at table; and, upon one occasion, screamed for an hour and a half because not permitted to share the bed of a lady who

had won his heart of hearts by telling him a fairy tale. Of course the beautiful Alfred was the pest of the house at least as much as the pet, and there could not be stronger proof that the acquaintance of its owners was highly valued by the neighbourhood, than the fact of its continuing to be the fashion to accept every invitation they gave, despite the manifold torments inflicted by their hopeful heir. Those, however, who were really sufficiently intimate in the family to know the young gentleman thoroughly, were aware that great relief might be obtained from his persecutions by employing the agency of the little Julia. It required, however, a good deal of familiarity with the interior of the establishment to learn this, for the diminutive and odd-looking little girl elicited very little notice from any one. Colonel and Mrs. Dermont, knowing that the child was perfectly well, and perfectly happy, did not feel it at all necessary to drag her forward into notice, in spite of the very evident indifference of all their guests towards

her. This general indifference had two causes: the first and most important being, that evidently there would be no use in taking notice of her, for that no one would be likely to receive the more notice from the colonel and his lady in return; not, however, that the colonel and his lady could have had the slightest objection to her being made as much the object of attention as was consistent with the superior claims of Alfred. They gave her precisely this degree of notice themselves, and they took it for granted that every body else did the same.

The second reason for her being so constantly overlooked and forgotten, arose from the fact that there really was nothing about her calculated to attract an unobservant eye. She was not absolutely ugly, but most assuredly she was not pretty; and, in truth, the only epithet that would do her justice, was that employed above—she was *odd-looking*. Her little round head had the appearance of a black ball, so dark and smooth was the short, straight, thick hair

that covered it. Her features were small, and perhaps regular, but there was nothing attractive in this; for her colourless complexion was so completely devoid of the pretty freshness which is so charming in children, that nobody was tempted to look at her with sufficient attention to discover whether the little nose, mouth, and chin, were well formed or not. Even her forehead, which really was broad, high, and well-shaped, in no way assisted her appearance, for her thick, coal-black hair was not even parted in front, and completely covered it, together with the pretty-enough little pencilled eyebrows ;—nay, her black eyes, too, lost a good deal of their effect (if, indeed, they had any), by the pent-house-like projection of this same black mass of hair; and it may fairly be doubted if any body living had ever observed either the length and richness of her eyelashes, or the size and shape of the dark eyes themselves.

The most marked observation that had ever yet been uttered upon her appearance,

was from a lively young lady, who, after looking at her for a minute or two, burst into a laugh, and said, "Is not that little creature like a magpie?—I never saw any thing else so completely black and white;" and the only word expressive of admiration which her little person had ever called forth, was an exclamation on the extreme smallness of her feet; but even this prettiness was less remarkable in her, poor little thing, than it would have been in any one else, from the universally tiny proportions of her singularly small person.

Her nurse was wont to say that she was a sharp little pin with a black head; and the simile was not a bad one, for as she stood upright, with her tiny feet close together, she really did almost look pointed. But this, however, was not the *sharpness* to which her nurse alluded: her phrase referred to a certain quickness of intellect, for which she was inclined to give her credit, but which, however, did not appear to be appreciated by any other member of the fa-

mily, unless, indeed, it was by the important Alfred himself. That there was *something* in the little girl's prattle when she was fairly set going, might be inferred from the fact, that if Julia at any time made up her mind to get Alfred away from any study, any play, or any person, she had only to buzz around him for a few minutes, much in the manner of a bee before it settles itself upon a flower, and though he was sure to begin with scolding her, and bidding her not be such a plague, she never failed to get something like honey at last; for the experiment invariably ended by his turning away from book, plaything, or playfellow, in order either to listen to some long story she was bent upon telling him, or else to accompany her upon some important expedition, wherein he was to be either useful or agreeable.

Now as it was a certain fact, "*bien, mais bien constaté*," that Master Alfred Dermont never did do any thing, or go anywhere, unless he preferred the said doing or going

to every thing else which, for the time being, could be said or done, it seems evident that he, as well as the nurse, had discovered some species of talent in Julia. Yet this peculiarity in the intercourse between the two children is badly described, for it seems to convey the idea of wilfulness on the part of the little girl—a consciousness, that is, of having a will of her own, and a strong inclination to have that will complied with—an inference altogether wrong and erroneous; for it is quite certain that Julia had lived a great many years longer in the world than we have yet given her, before any idea or sensation of having a will of her own had arisen in her mind. Had she at any moment been asked to tell what she liked, she would probably have laughed heartily, and replied, “any thing;” and if desired to say what she liked *best*, she might have laughed more heartily still, and cried, “every thing.” No, it was not a spirit of wilfulness that led little Julia to interfere with the proceedings of

her young companion; but it is easier to say what it was not, than to explain precisely what it was.

Notwithstanding the difference of age and sex—for Alfred Dermont was nearly four years older than Julia Drummond—but notwithstanding this, their education, such as it was, went on together; that is to say, that when Alfred was six years old, a governess was engaged, to whom both children were immediately consigned as pupils. She was an intelligent young woman, and when the tiny Julia was led in, as one of her intended scholars, she received her with a pleasant smile, which immediately won the little girl's heart; and having parted the thick hair upon her forehead (the first time that such an operation had ever been performed), and looked for a moment into the dark eyes that were raised to meet her own, she troubled Mrs. Dermont with no questions as to what she wished to have her taught.

But if the education of Julia threatened to

be rather premature, that of Alfred appeared very decidedly the reverse, for never as yet had his bright blue eyes been requested to fix themselves on the letters of the alphabet. This was rather a shock to the governess, which was not lessened by the young gentleman's saying, with very manly decision of tone, after his first lesson had continued about five minutes, looking full in poor Miss Harding's face as he spoke, "I think you are a very ugly person, and I think your play is a very stupid play, and if you ever ask me to play at it again, I will kick you.—Come along, Julia! those nasty ivory things are not half so pretty to play with as your doll."

Miss Harding, poor young woman, felt as many similarly situated young women have felt before, that she had rather a steep uphill path before her—but she felt also that she was not to be paid for nothing; and with a gentle sigh she watched the children run off, sitting immoveable in the place where

they left her, in deep meditation upon the ways and means to which it would be necessary to resort.

It is, however, needless to follow the patient labours of Miss Harding through the process of teaching the heir of the Mount to read; the intelligent reader will doubtless have anticipated the fact, that it was achieved at last, the only part of the business at all out of the common way being the extraordinary degree of assistance which the governess derived from Julia. At two years old she had spoken with perfect distinctness, and before she was four, she could read any book that was set before her. It was pretty to watch the devices by which the little creature contrived to conquer and baffle the averseness of her playfellow to follow her example. She exhibited during the process as many tricks as a monkey; for, either from temperament or instinct, all her manœuvrings were full of fun, and it was often amidst shouts of laughter, and oftener still in a game of romps upon the floor, that Master Alfred, in the

course of two years, acquired, what it had cost Julia about six months to learn.

But enough of these infant details. We must leave Alfred at eight, and Julia at four-and-a-half years old, and say no more about them till a dozen long years have passed over their heads.

CHAPTER III.

It has been said, and very truly, that it is not the *where*, but the *who*, which is chiefly important in the history of human beings; and therefore, although for reasons which have been sufficiently explained, I have declined naming the county in which the scenes which I am about to recount occurred, I shall not be equally scrupulous respecting the people who took part in them, but take the liberty of describing the most prominent among them with equal freedom and sincerity.

That they shall all be real human beings, who are existing, or who have existed, I faithfully promise and declare ; but I faith-

fully promise and declare likewise, that I will so manage matters as to leave no clue whatever to the recognition of the originals.

And now, shall I go "from house to house," like a royal *brief*, in order to bring my reader acquainted with all the neighbours who formed the society of Colonel and Mrs. Dermont?—or shall I content myself by narrating the adventures of my "principal family," and suffer all the rest to bring themselves forward in succession, as circumstances shall dictate? Perhaps I shall find myself obliged to have recourse to both.

At twenty years old, Alfred Dermont was certainly one of the very handsomest young men that ever was seen. He was six feet in height, but might have stood for the model of an Apollo. His features were magnificently handsome, and had his countenance expressed less of the daring self-confidence in which he had been so assiduously educated, it would have been charming—for the bright large blue eye was beaming with intelligence; his smile, though too often so

timed as to be most saucily impertinent, displayed teeth of the most perfect beauty, and his forehead might have been compared to that of any god or demigod that ever chisel cut, had not the frequent arching of the too flexible eyebrow, continually suggested the idea of contempt for those around him.

His education had been of so strangely irregular a kind, as almost to defy description. He certainly was not ignorant, and yet he could scarcely be said to be thoroughly well-informed on any subject—for his studies had in no direction ever gone beyond the point to which his inclination led him, and the moment he ceased to be amused, he ceased to study. When he had attained the age of twelve years, there had been some slight notion, or rather a great deal of unmeaning talk, about sending him to Eton. But his father confessed to his mother, and his mother confessed to his father, that it was no good to talk about it, for that they *could not* part with him, and having separately and

conjointly come to this decision, they determined, like sensible people, to act upon it.

They did act upon it; and Alfred Dermont never left the paternal roof, either for school or college. But tutors, English, French, and German, were bestowed upon him with the greatest liberality; and as the boy was really a quick boy, and some of the tutors really clever men, the result was a sort of patchwork; some portions of which were brilliant and effective, while "other some" were a good deal the reverse. As to Julia, Colonel Dermont continued steadfast in his amiable resolution, that not a single shilling of her fortune, either principal or interest, should ever be expended on her till, having arrived at majority, she should expend it herself. But the home education of Alfred was an expensive one, for it included horses, dogs, a town-built cab for the young gentleman's own particular driving, et cætera, et cætera; without mentioning a constantly increasing collection of books in a variety of

languages—so that the Colonel observed to his wife, that when Miss Harding went, there could be no objection to Julia's taking lessons with Alfred as she had hitherto always done; and that its being from a tutor instead of a governess, could make no difference. Nor did the little Julia herself, nor her friend, Alfred, nor any of the learned professors concerned, make any objection to the arrangement; and though the feminine accomplishments of music and drawing were left out, Julia became possessed of a larger portion of general information than generally falls to the lot of young ladies.

But at sixteen Julia continued to be a queer-looking little creature still, so much so indeed, that nobody thought it civil to talk about her appearance; and as her intellectual acquirements, whether great or little, were utterly unknown, save to her instructors and her friend Alfred, there was nothing to redeem her from the sort of easy oblivion which seemed to be her fate. But never did a happier creature exist on God's earth.

Her health was excellent, her spirits gay and equal ; she learnt all that was set before her with equal facility and correctness ; and as she never for a single instant made herself, her situation, her accomplishments, or her person, the subject of her own thoughts, she lived in a state of the most delightful unconsciousness as to her own insignificance.

It is curious to observe how very many evils and sufferings are avoided by people who are not occupied habitually in thinking of themselves. Such people are never shy ; such people are rarely awkward ; such people have the command of their own powers of mind in a degree that never can be enjoyed by the egotist. Good Colonel Dermont, when soothing himself, as he occasionally did, by boasting that he had given Julia Drummond an excellent education, little guessed how very excellent it had been. He knew not that he had smothered and annihilated in the heart of his ward the most fatal weakness that can beset humanity ; and

still less, perhaps, did he guess, that while conferring this inestimable benefit upon her, he was overwhelming his unfortunate son by fostering and cherishing in him, by every possible device, the identical mental malady from which she had so happily escaped. Nevertheless, it did not follow that, because little Julia Drummond was free from all illusions arising from self-love, she was free likewise from all illusions likely to arise from love to others. These, however, though often dangerous and mischievous, are very far from threatening the same degree of moral destruction which is pretty nearly inevitable upon the other; and therefore Julia, although at sixteen and a half she loved and admired Alfred rather more blindly, perhaps, than even his mother and father themselves, was in no danger of having any of the fine qualities of her heart destroyed thereby. Far different, alas ! was the condition of Alfred at the age of twenty. Nature had done as much for him as for her; but though brought up side by side, and receiving what

a superficial observer might call the same education, one little moral ingredient being different rendered the result rather a contrast than a resemblance. Poor Alfred ! how truly, simply, and sincerely did he believe himself to be one of the most glorious specimens of humanity that had ever been created. How firmly was he convinced of the necessity of his having his own will and his own way in all things, in order that every thing should go right ! And oh ! how many good gifts were neutralised, if not positively destroyed, by this conviction, and the headstrong wilfulness which accompanied it.

* * * *

“ What a delightful summer we seem likely to have,” said Mrs. Dermont to her husband, as they stood side by side looking down their beautiful lawn, and admiring the wide circle of fine flowering shrubs which surrounded it. “ Don’t you think, Colonel, that it would be a good scheme, if this fine weather lasts, to invite the whole neighbour-

hood together to something of a public breakfast on the lawn?—with music and dancing, you know. I think it would please Alfred, for he said yesterday that he wished there was a little more variety in our parties. He said it quite seriously.”

“Did he?” returned the colonel, with a look of great interest; “then I am sure we ought to manage to get a little more variety, and a dance on the lawn would be quite new, certainly. But how shall we get enough young men together? Ladies cannot dance without gentlemen, you know.”

“There is but one way, my dear colonel,” replied the lady; “you must ask all the officers that are quartered at Overby, *en masse*. People of consequence in a neighbourhood very often do that, you know, without having any personal introduction at all.”

“Yes, I know they do,” replied the colonel; “and I have no sort of objection, if Alfred approves it. It will lead to no great danger of making disagreeable acquaintance,

for I dare say they will be sent off again, as soon as the talk about riots is over. Alfred and I can ride to Overby, and speak to Major Sommerton about it. He is an old acquaintance, you know, and would give me a hint if there was any objection. Where is Alfred? Of course, we must not decide upon it till we have asked him. Have you seen him since breakfast? I looked for him in the library just now, but he was not there. Have you seen him?"

"Yes, colonel; I saw him within this half hour, walking away towards the wilderness with a book in his hand. What an extraordinary creature he is, to be sure! He certainly takes a pleasure in reading, even now that his education is so completely finished, as to render it quite unnecessary," said the mother. "He is a very extraordinary young man!"

"He is an extraordinary creature in every way!" replied the father. "But, if he is gone to the wilderness, let us go there too, and speak to him about this scheme of

yours," he added, offering his arm to his wife.

After a few minutes walking in the shade of the nicely kept shrubbery, which they called the wilderness, they perceived their son seated on a bench at the end of one of the cross walks, with a book in his hand, and Julia Drummond standing before him, whether listening to his reading aloud, or only looking at him, they could not tell.

"What a peculiarly graceful attitude he has chosen, colonel, hasn't he?" said Mrs. Dermont, pausing for a moment to gaze upon him.

"I will not deny it," returned the colonel, yielding to the pressure on his arm, which was intended to restrain his steps, and looking quite as fondly on the long lounging limbs of his handsome son, as the mother herself could do. "He certainly is the finest fellow of his age that I ever looked at."

"I believe you, my dear," replied his wife, with an expressive smile. "But what

a blessing it is, Colonel Dermont," she continued, "that Julia Drummond is so plain! Don't you observe how constantly they are together? And if she were at all well-looking, or particularly striking in any way, I should be frightened to death lest he should take it into his head to fall in love with her. But, thank goodness, there is no danger of that!"

"It is quite as well, perhaps, that Julia should be plain as handsome," replied the colonel, "because it sets your mind, and it may be my own too, at rest upon that matter. But, between ourselves, wife, Alfred is not a young man to throw his heart away upon any girl who had nothing better to distinguish her than a pretty face. Alfred has an immense deal of proper pride, and you may take my word for it, that he will never dream of making any matrimonial connection that will not satisfy us in every way. I would trust his judgment in all ways before yours or mine."

"I think so, too, colonel. If ever there

was a perfect human being upon the earth, it is our Alfred !" and as she pronounced these truly maternal words, Mrs. Dermont propelled her husband's footsteps as gently and as effectually, as she had before restrained them, and, in a few minutes, they stood beside their son, with their four fond eyes fixed earnestly upon him.

"We have followed you to your literary retreat, Alfred, in order to consult you about a little party that your mother is proposing to give," said Colonel Dermont, laying his hand caressingly on the young man's shoulder. "Will you consent to put your book down for a little while to listen to us?"

"Here, Julia ! take the book, I have had quite enough of it," replied the young man, putting the novel, with which he had been beguiling the sultry morning, into the hands of his young companion. "Now then, ma'am," addressing his mother, "what is it you have got to say?"

"Do you think you could make room for

us, Alfred? For it is really too hot for any body to stand."

The young man immediately changed his recumbent attitude for one that occupied one-third of the seat, instead of the whole of it, and his father and mother placed themselves beside him, Julia still retaining her standing position in front.

Nothing, however, could be further from the heart of either the colonel or his lady, than any unkind, or even uncivil feeling towards their young ward; but this sort of negligence towards her was become so habitual, as to render it almost impossible that they should treat her otherwise than as a mere child, towards whom any thing in the least degree approaching ceremony would be absolutely ridiculous.

There were many moments in which the young Alfred appeared to be under the influence of the same sort of feeling; but, nevertheless, the truth was, that he was beginning to be annoyed sometimes, if any one, besides himself, treated her too cavalierly;

and, on the present occasion, perceiving that there was no room for her on the bench, he quietly got up, and with a slow, deliberate, and rather languid-seeming step, walked the distance of about a hundred yards to a tree, under which there was a moveable mushroom seat, and passing a finger through the aperture at the top of it, conveyed it, with the same lagging step, to the spot where the group was assembled. He then replaced himself on the bench, and having done so, put down the stool which still hung suspended on his finger, exactly in front of himself, making a silent sign to Julia, that she was to take possession of it. She did so with a short bright glance of gratitude towards her sublime friend ; while Mrs. Dermont said, with a smile, “ upon my word, Miss Julia, I think you are highly honoured.” A slight frown, the very slightest in the world, passed over the brow of Alfred, and then he said—“ Well, ma’am, what is it you have got to tell me ?”

“ Why, Alfred,” replied his mother, “ you

see, my dear, that the weather is most beautifully fine, and I have been thinking that, by way of making a little variety, and trying something new in the manner of receiving our neighbours, we might, if you like it, my dear, give something of a dance upon the lawn—something in the way of a public breakfast, you know. What do you say to it, Alfred?”

“Oh dear, ma’am, I have no objection whatever—provided you can get together people enough. But our lawns are very large, remember, and it will be a very forlorn-looking business if the groups are too thinly scattered.—Should you like it, Julia?”

Both colonel and Mrs. Dermont felt this question to be rather an idle interruption in the discussion of so interesting a subject; but as it came from Alfred, they of course paused till the answer was given; and this did not take long, for Julia replied with great glee, and without pausing for a minute.

“Like it? To be sure I should! I should think it would be the most beautiful

thing in the world ! People dancing upon the lawn ! Oh ! lovely."

" Well, well,—no doubt of it—and now let us think a little about numbers, Alfred," said Mrs. Dermont, " that you must know is the point that puzzles us."

" Unfortunately the people here, for the most part, are horrible bores," said the young man ; " that is to say that the women are almost all of them ugly."

" All of them, Alfred ?" said his father, smiling, and holding up his finger. " Have you forgotten the beautiful Miss Thorwold?"

" No, I have not forgotten her," replied the young man, colouring slightly ; " but I did not know whether she might not be gone before your fête—she is only on a visit you know—if she were to be here—."

" She is to stay the whole year, my dear, I can tell you," said his mother. " Her uncle, Lord Ripley, is to take her to town with him when the parliament meets after Christmas—and then as to numbers, we must do, you know, as all country people are obliged

to do when they give a fête champêtre—we must invite all the best of the Overby people—there is no help for it—we must ask the Overby people.”

“Oh dear, yes!” said the colonel; “we can do so on such an occasion as this without the slightest impropriety. It will not do as a general practice, I know, for country families to make much visiting with the country-town people, it would be breaking down all distinction, but at a great gathering of the natives, such as a christening or coming of age; you hear, on any thing of that sort, all the first nobility of the kingdom invite the people of their country town, and fête champêtre invitations may be quite as general, without giving occasion to any disagreeable observations whatever. Yes, certainly, we must ask the Overby people.”

“I wish you would tell me, ma’am,” said Julia, who had been listening with great attention, “what is the reason why people that live in a country town are not thought fit to visit the people that live outside the

town. I am sure that some of the town children that Alfred and I used to meet at the dancing-school at Overby, were the very best scholars Mr. Laman had, and some of them were so pretty and good-natured?"

"There is no reason in the world, Julia," said Colonel Dermont, in a tone of very philosophical liberality, "no reason whatever, my dear, why the children of persons living in a country town should not be pretty and good-natured. But you must remember, my dear child, that it is the duty of the higher classes of society to keep up the distinctions which it has pleased Providence to make; and gentlemen residing on their estates in the country are quite a different class of people from those who live in the country towns. Perhaps you cannot, as yet, fully understand this."

"Oh! yes!" replied Julia, "I know all about the difference that riches, and high birth, and good education make, and that it is a very mischievous idea to suppose that all the people in the world would be hap-

pier if all these distinctions were removed. Because God himself has made men different in their dispositions, or as to their powers, so that they *must be* in different situations. Miss Harding and Mr. Brown too, used to explain all that to us, and Alfred and I both understood it very well. But it does not seem to me that the impossibility of the country gentlemen visiting the town gentlemen has any thing to do with that."

"Of course, my dear little girl, you can as yet have only learned the great general rules of all organised society. It requires a longer acquaintance with life to become acquainted with what may be called the special regulations of the different classes. But we are too busy for me to enter upon any such explanation just at present. Yet even the business before us, my dear, will give you an opportunity of remarking that there is no want of liberality in *our* notions on the subject. I am clearly of opinion, Alfred, that we may venture to invite poor good Major Murray's two daughters. You know we have had

them here repeatedly, in an evening, already—and then there is the widow of the late vicar, and her pretty daughter. And, if your mother does not object to it, I really don't see why we should not invite Mr., Mrs., and Miss Kersley, and the young attorney—the son I mean—not the other young man who is articled to Mr. Kersley. I don't know anything about him. Kersley himself is an exceedingly respectable and decent person, and has dined here already, as you all know, over and over again."

"No, I shall have no objection whatever," replied Mrs. Dermont; "they are very decent people, all of them—decent, well-behaved people."

"Decent!—my dear mother," exclaimed Alfred, raising his eye-brows, "that phrase does not seem to promise much for the elegance of your party."

"I wish," said Julia, looking very earnestly in the face of Mrs. Dermont, "I wish you would tell me the real meaning of the word '*decent*?' "

"It has more meanings than one, my dear Julia," replied Mrs. Dermont; "but what we mean by it at present is, that the Kersleys are well-looking, well-dressed sort of people, and perfectly respectable in character."

"Oh! not like that second son of Mr. Fitzwarrington, of Warrington Park?" said Julia, nodding her head—"I understand."

Alfred laughed, and said, "What an impertinent little thing you are, Julia."

"What does she mean, Alfred?" said the colonel.

Alfred laughed again. "I suspect, sir," he replied, "that she is alluding to the story she heard Mrs. Beaumont tell the other day, about William Fitzwarrington's having won that horse-race unfairly. I dare say Julia does not think that decent at all—that is what she means."

"That is a foolish play on words, my dear," said Mrs. Dermont, gravely. "It is all very well to make jokes when there is no business going on; but now we really

are busy, so don't interrupt us, Julia, with any more nonsense. If this party is to be given, we must not waste time, I assure you."

"We shall do nothing, mother, without pen, ink, and paper," said Alfred, rising, "so I vote that we adjourn to the library."

Of course this suggestion was immediately complied with, and to the library they went, Alfred leading the way, his father and mother following, and Julia coming after, in obedience to a signal from the young man.

CHAPTER IV.

“ Sit down, Julia, and write the names as we call them over,” said Mrs. Dermont ; “ that is what Alfred says ought to be done first.”

Julia obeyed ; and a list of such respectable length was soon produced, as seemed to surprise all the party.

“ I had no idea there were so many people in the neighbourhood,” said Mrs. Dermont.

“ It always turns out so, my dear, when one sets about gathering people together. I suppose Julia is to be secretary in producing the invitations,” said the colonel, “ and while this is going on, Alfred and I

had better ride over to Overby, if he has no objection, and make a few inquiries of Major Sommerton, respecting the young officers that are quartered at Overby."

The omnipotent Alfred fortunately made no objection, though he curled his handsome lip a little, at the notion of inviting "a parcel of red coats *en masse*." But on his mother's remarking, with a sigh, that disagreeable as this certainly was, it would be impossible to get up a tolerable dancing party without it, the young man, after indulging in another sneer at the possible danger of such promiscuous hospitality, condescendingly assured her that he did not seriously mean to oppose it.

"Write the notes, of course you must, Julia," said he, as he left the library, "but take care, if you please, not to forget that hole in the fishing-net, which I told you to mend for me; it is very possible I may want it to-morrow."

"My dear, dearest Mrs. Dermont," cried Julia, the moment they were left alone,

“will you have the very great kindness to let me do a few minutes’ work that I am very anxious about, before I begin writing the notes?—I will write as quick as lightning afterwards.”

“Go to work first!—no indeed, Julia, I can’t let you do any such thing,” replied Mrs. Dermont, with a good deal of severity; “and I really wish you would not be quite so thoughtless. How can any work of yours signify in comparison to these invitations?”

“No, certainly, ma’am,” replied Julia, colouring, with eagerness to defend herself from a charge of presumption, of which she would not have been guilty for the world; “it is not for myself, dear Mrs. Dermont, it is something for Alfred;—he has told me to mend his fishing-net.”

“I beg your pardon, my dear,” replied her protectress; “of course you must do it then; its being for him makes all the difference in the world, you know. But I hope it will not take very long.”

Julia promised speed, and kept her word so well, that the net was mended, and all the notes written, before the two gentlemen returned from their ride.

And will not our following some of these notes to their destinations afford an excellent opportunity for introducing some of those who were happy enough to be neighbours to the distinguished family at the Mount?

“A note from the Dermonts, George, for a *déjeuner à la fourchette*, for the 24th,” cried Celestina Marsh, rushing into her brother’s study, with a flushed cheek, and eyes that seemed dancing so joyously, as to run some risk of jumping out of her head.

“I am very glad to hear it, Celestina, for I see it delights you,” replied the gentle personage she addressed, “though I confess I don’t very well know what a *déjeuner à la fourchette* means in England.”

“Nonsense, George!—it means the most delightful sort of entertainment in the world!—dancing, rambling, lounging, rustic and

fanciful ; dressed exactly as much as you please, but with no form or ceremony whatever. It may be made as whimsical and becoming as one likes ; and in short, the whole thing is a species of saturnalia for taste and high spirits. I am enchanted !—and I don't think any thing in the whole world could have pleased me so well ; unless, indeed, it had been an invitation to join in private theatricals, and I rather think that would have been better still. Not that I mean to be discontented, I promise you, with a *fête champêtre*."

While Miss Celestina Marsh was uttering these words, which she did with equal energy and rapidity, her brother gazed upon her with a look of the deepest interest, mingled with a good deal of surprise. "My dearest love," said he, in rather a plaintive tone of voice, "I cannot express my joy !—but I confess, my beloved sister, that I am as much surprised as I am rejoiced. Little did I expect—little did I dare to hope, after our conversation of yes-

terday, that I should so soon see you restored to cheerfulness—to happiness !”

“ Alas! George,” returned the young lady (Miss Celestina Marsh still wanted five months of thirty), “ were it not for the occasional return of my animal spirits, you would not be long condemned to endure any anxiety for me. It has pleased Providence in its mercy, my dear brother,”—and Celestina Marsh drew out her handkerchief as she spoke—“ it has pleased Providence, when bestowing on me the dear but perilous gift of sensibility, to accompany it by a native lightness of heart and elasticity of spirit, which enables me to endure, without sinking, the bitter sorrows you have witnessed!—you must not reproach me with this, my dearest George!” she added, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes, “ but on the contrary, you must join with me in hailing every short return of forgetfulness which enables me to endure existence. It is thus only that my life can be saved!”

Hurt beyond measure at having brought

tears to the eyes of his orphan sister, for George and Celestina Marsh had neither father nor mother, the gentle-hearted young man took her hand, and entreated her to be composed. "The greatest wish I have in the world, Celestina," said he, "is to make you happy, and never, never again will I check your innocent cheerfulness by an ill-timed recurrence to feelings less delightful."

These kind and soothing words appeared to produce a healing effect on the agitated spirit of his sister, for she immediately put the handkerchief into her pocket again, and smiled upon him almost as gaily as before she pulled it out. "And who knows, my dearest George," she exclaimed, with renovated glee, "what this delightful *déjeuner* may bring forth?—that Wheeler loves me, I cannot doubt; a hundred, ay, a thousand dear recollections press on my heart at this moment to assure me of it! But, alas! we know too well that the frank-hearted, guileless young man has not sufficient strength of

mind, and firmness of character, to resist the insidious and most wicked blandishments of that shameless flirt, Louisa Morris!—But let us not think of her at this happy moment! Who knows, my dearest George, but that if you can manage to let me have only a tolerably pretty new dress for this occasion, I may be able to bring the dear truant back to his allegiance? You brothers are allowed by all the world to be the worst possible judges of a sister's claims to admiration, but whatever *you* may think of that horrid Miss Morris, I believe there is nobody else who would not allow, that when I am decently well-dressed (which, I confess, happens but seldom), I have no great reason to fear competition with her."

This last hint from Miss Celestina Marsh about her dress, went to the heart of her brother; and why it did so must be explained, in order to make the reader acquainted with the situation of this brother and sister, who are likely to appear frequently before him in the course of my narrative. Mr. Marsh, al-

though but a poor man, was accounted, even by the Dermonts themselves, as fairly ranking among the hereditary gentlemen of the county. His mother's name of Tremayne was considerably more aristocratic than that of his father; and although the estate she brought at her marriage with him was any thing but large, it gave her son and heir the right of being classed among the most respectable of the old county families, and George Tremayne Marsh, of Locklow Wood, although his real revenue (in consequence of a heavy mortgage on his estate) did not exceed five hundred a year, was received everywhere with the consideration always granted to the representative of an old and respectable family. It was much to be lamented that the self-willed young heiress, his mother, had not bestowed herself and her acres better; for the person she married had nothing whatever to recommend him, but a vulgarly handsome face. The son and daughter who have been introduced to the reader, were the only offspring of this marriage. The daugh-

ter, who was by two years the elder, was like her father in person, and her mother in temper—the son was like neither of them, but resembled more the better type of the Tremayne race which had flourished in the olden time. The only symptom of compliance with the wishes of her friends which the late Mrs. Marsh had condescended to show when she married, was the having her property secured by settlement to herself and her heirs; this was done, and with the proviso also, that she might, by will, leave what proportion of it she chose to younger children. Mrs. Marsh survived her husband a few years, and then died intestate, thus leaving her daughter utterly dependant upon her brother.

But no reasonable provision that her mother could have made for her by will, could have given her so large a claim upon the encumbered little estate as did this dependance. Almost in the same hour that George Tremayne Marsh learned that his mother was dead, intestate, and his sister left alone, and

without resources in the mansion that was now become his own, did he set off from Heidelberg, where he had, for some years, been residing upon a hundred pounds a year, amongst learned men and magnificent scenery, in order to cherish and comfort her.

Nature had made this brother and sister marvellously little alike; and this dissimilarity was still further increased by education; for no two processes could be less likely to produce similar effects, than a prolonged tête à tête association with Mrs. Marsh, and a studious residence in a German university. Most fortunate was it for Miss Celestina that her brother was *not* like her; for if he had been, the little income which with such difficulty could be made to support a respectable appearance in the all-too-large old mansion, would not have been so almost wholly devoted to her use. There was a sort of sublime simplicity in the character of George Marsh, which rendered him, in fact, singularly well calculated to become the victim of such a young lady as his sister.

He had found her in what appeared to him the most pitiable condition that a woman could be in—her poverty, however, making by far the least part of her misfortunes in his eyes. But he found her alone, and apparently without a single intimate and attached friend in the world. He found her too, looking much older than he expected, and, despite all the affection which his kind heart yearned to feel for her, he could not help thinking in the very inmost recesses of his secret soul, that she was, take her for all in all, about the least attractive young woman he had ever seen.

In the first place, she could neither sing nor play; and cared no more about either music, poetry, sculpture, painting, or the beauties of nature, than his little dog. And then, in appearance, although it was not absolutely impossible perhaps, that some people might agree with *her* in opinion, rather than with *him*, to his eyes, poor young man, she really appeared one of the plainest females he had ever looked at; for he admired in

woman nothing that was not delicate and *mignonne*, and he found his sister tall, stout, high-coloured, with an immense quantity of coarse black hair, great, bold, staring black eyes, and a long nose, the tip of which was certainly beginning to approach in hue to the bright carnation of her cheeks. But there was not one of these gifts, albeit they certainly seemed to him to be any thing but good, which did not rather increase than diminish his earnest and steadfast resolution to love, to cherish, to comfort, to console her. "Poor, poor Celestina!" he mentally exclaimed, on finding himself alone after his first interview with her in her orphan state, "poor, poor Celestina! what has she to render life happy? What has she to render life endurable to her? She must, by Heaven she *shall*, be my first, and dearest object in existence. Every body else in the world has somebody to love and care for them. But who has this unfortunate Celestina to love and care for her? Other, all other beings have more or less the power to win affec-

tion from their fellow-creatures. But my unhappy sister ! Ah ! I will devote myself to her. My life shall pass in endeavours to atone to her for the singular combination of adverse circumstances which seem to beset her. Alas ! How can my worthless life be better passed ?”

Never was a purpose formed from purer motives ; nor ever was a purpose kept with more unswerving resolution. It was not long before George Marsh perceived, that in addition to all the sources of sorrow and mortification with which the fate of his poor destitute sister seemed loaded, she had to endure the yet bitterer pangs of disappointed affection. Celestina, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, confessed to her brother, ere they had passed an entire week together, that the tender assiduities of young Ensign Wheeler, who had been quartered during the last two months at Overby, had irrevocably won her affections, and that her only chance of happiness on earth rested on the power and will of him, her dearly beloved

brother, to bring this mutual attachment to a happy issue. Tearful and plaintive as was the tone of this confession, it was very far from adding to the anxieties of George Marsh; on the contrary, her agitated statement of the young ensign's attentions, conveyed a sensation of the truest pleasure to his heart. He thanked Heaven in his very inmost soul, that all men did not see his sister with his eyes, and he promised, with all the energy of his kind nature, that nothing should be wanting on his part to ensure her happiness. But alas! it soon became evident, not only to his own observation, but by the heart-rending confidence of the unhappy Celestina herself, that whatever the attentions of the fickle ensign might once have been, he was now far, oh! very far, from manifesting for her a passion at all equal to that which she still resolutely avowed she felt for him. Some men, under the circumstances, might have doubted the accuracy of the lady's statement respecting the former conduct of the young officer; but

no such doubt ever entered the head of George Marsh for a single instant. George was truth itself in all his thoughts, words, and deeds, and it would have been far easier to teach him the most crabbed new language that ever was invented, than to have so far initiated him in the mysterious characters of falsehood, as to make him doubt a statement deliberately made to him by his sister, and accompanied by the—to him—solemn testimony of sighs and tears.

And then, how poor George's heart ached for her! He knew what love was; for he had loved and lost (by death) a fair young creature, as true and as devoted as himself; and, doubtless, the state of mind in which this event had left him, had much to do with the too yielding indulgence of his conduct towards his sister. Too yielding it certainly was; and this was the reason why her hint about her not being well dressed went so painfully to his heart; for, in truth, her demands upon his purse for the deco-

ration of her person had been answered, during the few months which they had already passed together since the death of their mother, with a liberality much more in proportion to his generous kindness, than to his contracted means. His mother had left many little bills to be paid; and, moreover, he had thought it right to erect a handsome marble tablet to the memory of the last of the Tremaynes of Stoke; so that the first paying for Celestina's deep mourning as well as his own, and the subsequently supplying her with money (over and above her too liberal allowance) for the purchase of what she called *decent half mourning*, had not been done without great difficulty and privation on his part. And therefore it was that the reproach implied by her words pained him a good deal; and something a little like consciousness that he did not deserve it, might have glanced through his mind. But pity chased it before it could take root there, and he immediately an-

swered, "How much money will be necessary for the dress, my dearest Celestina? Indeed I will try to let you have it if I can."

"Why most girls, George, wouldn't manage it under ten pounds, but I'll do it with five, and well too, I'll answer for it," she replied.

"I have not got so much in my pocket, Celestina," he answered with a sigh, which was, however, checked before it was fully breathed; "but to-morrow I think I shall be able to get it for you. I have quite made up my mind to sell my little horse, for I am certainly as well able to walk as you are, and you have got no conveyance, and when Crop is sold, I shall not only have the money for him, but I may sell the little mow of hay too; so you may depend upon having the five pounds, Celestina, either to-morrow or next day, at the very farthest. I will set about it directly."

"Pray let me have it to-morrow, George," returned his sister. "It will be too provoking to waste a whole day when I have

so much to do. Besides, I *must* go to Overby to-morrow, and then I can buy the things at once."

"I will go to Farmer Dawes, and see if I cannot get it directly," said her brother; and without waiting for her reply, he hastened from the room and the house.

CHAPTER V.

THE next invitation we must follow, was addressed to a newly-married couple of the name of Stephens, who, like the inhabitants of Locklow Wood, were among the nearest neighbours to "the Mount." The lady was a person of good fortune—some thirty thousand pounds or so; the gentleman, who was at least twelve years her junior, had little or nothing, save himself, to bestow, in return for the fair hand, the devoted heart, and the handsome portion of the lady.

But, unlike the generality of matches of this class, no disappointment on either side appeared to have followed the nuptials; for the mutual admiration and attachment of

the happy pair for each other increased, as was evident to all who knew them, with every day they lived.

Mr. Stephens, though he had not been fortunate enough to procure any preferment in his profession, was a clergyman, and at the time when he was so happy as to meet with his wife, had been looking about for a curacy, upon which, together with the income arising from his fellowship, it was his intention to exist. Greatly, however, did he prefer the different mode of life pointed out to him by the lady whose affections he was so lucky as to captivate. She did not like a curacy; and still less of course, did she like that the man she adored should continue to pine in the heartless solitude of a fellowship. So they were married after an acquaintance of about six weeks, and reading in the *Times* newspaper an advertisement of an "elegant residence" to be let in the county of ——, near the important market town of Overby, they came, looked at, and hired it, with a celerity equal

to that with which they had taken a lease of each other for life. Beech-hill was a small, but rather pretty-looking place, and as it had always been included in the list of mansions forming "the neighbourhood," its being taken by a clergyman, who immediately laid out several hundred pounds in embellishments, naturally secured its being so still—and, indeed, every body said that they might consider themselves very lucky, in these shop-keeping days, to have Beech-hill taken by such "nice people"—for nice people every body seemed determined to find them.

Mr. and Mrs. Stephens had already dined twice at the Mount, though their own dining-room being still unfinished had prevented their giving any party in return; and they were both greatly pleased by the flattering hospitality which thus again solicited their company at the principal place in the neighbourhood.

Here again were a pair, insignificant enough, perhaps, as to the position they held in that world of fashion, which so

liberally offers to the historian of *life* all that it has of richest and rarest, wherewith to adorn his pages. But notwithstanding the comparative insignificance of Mr. and Mrs. Stephens, when considered in relation to this said world of fashion, they were very far, indeed, from being insignificant in the world of Stoke; and as that is the region wherein for the present we are about to linger, I shall take the liberty of endeavouring to make the reader acquainted with them. Would that I could hope this acquaintance would prove as interesting to this dear reader, as it has proved to me! But if I fail in this, I must console myself by remembering, like Lafontaine,

“Que si de l'agr  er je n'emporte pas le prix,
J'aurais ou moins l'honneur de l'avoir entrepris.”

Mr. and Mrs. Stephens, if not what can properly be called people of fashion, were, as they could have themselves told you, something a great deal better—they were people of superior minds—they were people of the very highest order of intelligence; and this,

not in the mere ordinary walks of literature, wherein we may often see many clever kinds of people wandering and enjoying themselves, not one of whom could be compared in sublimity of mental elevation to either Mr. or Mrs. Stephens. It was the sympathy of their minds in this respect which rendered their union one of such very-much-out-of-the-common-way harmony.

In the first instance, indeed, it is possible that the attraction which brought them together might have arisen, on his part, from the pleasure of finding a lady, known by all the world to be in the possession of thirty thousand pounds, so very obligingly ready to listen to all he had to say—while on hers, the finding herself more noticed at thirty-five, than any other young lady of her acquaintance, by a tolerably well-looking young man of twenty-three and a-half, might have been sufficient to produce those gentle accents and gentler glances, which led to the thrice happy marriage that followed. But once united, once brought together within

reach of the daily and hourly intercourse of souls, their mutual attachment became such as can only be the result of the sublimest species of intellectual sympathy.

To watch these two minds, as I have done, each waiting, amidst all the frivolities of ordinary society, for the ethereal sparks which they knew *must* come from the other—to watch them waiting, and not in vain—to mark the fond welcoming glance of admiration with which these confidently looked-for scintillations were received, now by the one, and now by the other, is truly one of the most delicious occupations in the world! But the gratification arising from such a spectacle as this, cannot be described, it must be felt, in order to be understood; and all I can do towards making my readers share in the pleasure I have received from a tolerably intimate acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs. Stephens, is to relate from time to time some of the charming anecdotes, and repeat some of the beautiful sentiments and opinions which I have seen and heard.

There is, however, one thing respecting them which a love of truth leads me frankly to mention at once, in preference to leaving the discovery of it to the sagacity of the reader. Mrs. Stephens was an Unitarian, and I believe it cannot be doubted by those well acquainted with this peculiarly well-matched pair, that Mr. Stephens (notwithstanding his profession) is now a good deal inclined to the same faith. I am not an Unitarian myself, and I do not scruple to confess that I am not very much disposed to tolerate this schism cordially in others. But the admiration I have so freely expressed above, for Mr. and Mrs. Stephens, ought to be received as a proof that I am not *unreasonably* the reverse.

“*A déjeuner à la fourchette* is a very pretty thing, my dear William, if it be well done,” said Mrs. Stephens, as she folded up the note which contained their acceptance of the agreeable invitation. “But do you know, I am rather sorry they have thought of it, for it is exactly the thing I have been plan-

ning in my own head for us to give. It is a little out of the common way, and it won't do for us, you know, to give our first party quite in the jog-trot old fashioned dinner style. Not to mention that I particularly wish to give a party that shall include everybody at once. It is so much more economical."

"To be sure it is, my sweetest Arabella!—and it is really very provoking that you should be forestalled thus."

"Never mind, dearest!—Depend upon it I shall find that they do not do the thing in my way—and if I am right in this, a second *déjeuner à la fourchette* may be given in the parish of Stoke, with very good effect."

"If you arrange it, sweetest, its effect cannot fail," replied her adoring young husband. But almost before the words were uttered, an anxious shadow seemed to rest upon his brow, and taking her hand, he added in a whisper—"Remember our hopes, sweetest!—promise me that you will not exert yourself too much!"

She patted his cheek, and playfully replied, "Silly man!—I will take care of myself, depend upon it."

He pressed her hand to his heart—rang the bell, and despatched the answer to the Mount.

This done, the lady unlocked the carefully-closed drawer of her little work-table, and drew thence some small work which seemed to be of a very delicate texture, and which had this of peculiar about it, that neither canvass, nor worsted, gold thread, nor steel beads, made any part of it; to this little work she now devoted herself most assiduously.

"Delicious spectacle!" murmured Mr. Stephens, looking at her for a moment with inconceivable tenderness. "And I will read to you the while!"

She nodded her head in smiling and affectionate approval, and after holding up before his eyes, with an air half bashful, half playful, a morsel of fine linen, which she was fashioning into something which appeared

greatly to interest them both, she put on her thimble, and again began to sew.

And then, having breathed a soft sigh, and once more murmured the word, "Sweetest!" Mr. Stephens took his paper-knife, and began to cut open the pages of a volume, which had just arrived, among other similar treasures, from America.

"What a luxury it is, my dearest Arabella," said he, after he had been thus occupied for a minute or two. "What an invaluable luxury it is to us, with our insatiable appetites for literature, this being able to get all the new American publications at such a very trifling expense! Your acquaintance with that American captain is a blessing beyond all price. And that admirable idea of yours, of sending a few pages about fashionable life in England to his wife, every time his vessel returns, is evidently considered as a most ample payment. I would make you any bet, sweetest, that every word you write, all invented as it is, out of your own dear clever head, appears in all the fashion-

able newspapers in the Union, and in point of fact, it does exactly as well for them, you know, as if you were really living in the midst of the court circle. And if so, love! where is the harm of this little fraud?"

"I hope it does please them, William," replied Mrs. Stephens, in a conscientious tone of voice, "for I should be extremely sorry to give Captain Vondersmutch the trouble of bringing us over a packet of books every time he comes, without repaying him for it in some way. And, as at present, I certainly feel that by much our highest duty, is the taking care that no thoughtless extravagance of ours shall injure the dear unborn creature, whose welfare is so inexpressibly dear to us both, I feel bound in duty to exert my ingenuity—nor can I call this a fraud."

"It is impossible, sweetest, that there can be a second opinion between us on that point; and this is precisely the reason why I so highly value the good offices of Captain Vondersmutch. It would be morally im-

possible, sweetest, that you and I, with our minds, could exist without a constant supply of new books. And what on earth would become of us, were we obliged to indulge this intellectual craving, by purchasing new *English* works, from an *English* bookseller?"

"It could not be thought of, *Liebe*," replied Mrs. Stephens, who, amongst her other accomplishments, had once studied the German language for six weeks; and it spoke well for the tender softness of her nature, that the only word which still rested on her memory with sufficient distinctness to be useful, was that which she now used in addressing her young husband. "It could not be thought of, *Liebe*," she replied, "and whatever intellectual pangs we might have suffered from the want of new books, we must, perforce, have endured them, had no dear, good Captain Vondersmutch come to our relief. For after all, William, you may depend upon it, that the feelings of a mother are the most powerful of our nature! Thou

wilt not chide me for this thought, Liebe, wilt thou?"

Mr. Stephens felt, that at such a moment of excitement as this, a tender caress must be expected, as the only suitable reply that could be offered by a fond husband to so enchanting a wife. He therefore laid down his new book, and he laid down his paper-knife upon it, and then opening wide his arms as he rose from his chair, he closed them not till Mrs. Stephens was within them, and then he pressed her to his bosom, and gave her a most tender kiss. This done, he returned to his comfortable arm-chair—for since his marriage, Mr. Stephens had always sat in a very comfortable arm-chair—and having resumed his occupation, spoke as follows; his wife holding her needle suspended the while, to listen to him.

"There is still another reason, sweetest, why we should be grateful to your excellent friend, Captain Vondersmutch, and that is, that without his aid, it would be absolutely impossible, let us spend as much

money as we would, for us to find ourselves so much in advance of our age, as we do at present. Who is there, among the whole circle of our acquaintance, who is acquainted with United States' literature as we are? Not a single individual, Arabella, not one! There is but one reason, in my opinion, which can satisfactorily account for the unnatural degree of indifference manifested in Europe, for the literary compositions of the new world. It is jealousy; trust me, it is jealousy, and nothing else. We know that they are our superiors in freedom of thought, in boldness of principle, and in originality of expression. Fine spirits produce fine issues, my Arabella—can we wonder then, at the thoughts of these unshackled freemen—free in every sense of the word—free in politics—free in elections—free in religion. And free too, beyond all the nations of the earth, upon that stiff-necked point of the moral code, which absurdly brands as dishonesty, what is, in fact, the legitimate offspring of necessity. For how, in Heaven's name, is

any man, or any body of men, to pay money when they have not got it to pay? Must not all reasoning, founded on such a theory as this, prove a mixture of false logic, and false principle? How perfectly superior are American citizens, Arabella, to the production of either the one or the other! Yes, sweetest! Fine spirits produce fine issues. You may look for this always; and I will venture to predict, that you will never be disappointed."

"Ah, Liebe!" returned his wife, looking at him with a face full of meaning. "Oh, Liebe! when will you honestly confess to me, that you can trace both the fine spirits, and the fine issues which proceed from them, to the absence of the degrading religious superstitions which disgrace our country? and, which once, as you cannot deny, disgraced yourself?"

"My dearest love, I should be ready to confess it to-morrow, were it not that I perfectly well know we should lose consideration in this neighbourhood, and in fact, in

society generally, were I to throw aside the title of reverend, and proclaim myself openly a seceder from the church of England. Besides, sweetest, the treasure yet unborn, might find my doing so a disadvantage. How could we possibly ask any person of consequence to stand godfather, or godmother, to our child? Think of this, beloved one! and then blame me, if you can."

"There is something in that, Liebe," returned Mrs. Stephens; and she dropped the subject—requesting him without further delay, to begin reading the book she was longing for!

CHAPTER VI.

THE next of the Dermont invitations whose reception I shall record was delivered at what was decidedly the most *comfortable* house in the neighbourhood. This may sound like very homely praise, and may perhaps lead the thoughtless, or over-fine, to fancy that Mrs. Verepoint, and her daughter Charlotte, lived in a warm, but small parlour, enjoying a southern aspect and no smoke; but without any pretensions to be classed among the beau-monde of the county. But any person drawing this conclusion from my word comfortable, would blunder egregiously. I have mentioned as one of the happy circumstances in the situation of the Dermont

family, that their greatness was overshadowed by no towering nobles near them ; but this though strictly true, does not prevent its being equally so that old Mrs. Verepoint and her young daughter had good blood in their veins; and though our nameless county was neither Westmoreland nor Cumberland there was, nevertheless, an old stone escutcheon over the door of entrance, on which might be traced the annulets which have for so many ages belonged to their race. The good lady herself, too, was descended from a long line of Norman ancestors, and though much too sensible a woman to suffer any feeling of family pride to make itself visible through the bland, kind-tempered suavity of her perfectly well-bred manner, there was about her a sort of high chivalresque aristocracy, which was to her pure morality, what a brilliant setting is to a precious gem, it could not add to its intrinsic worth, but it showed the value in which it was held, and decidedly increased the care that was taken of it.

Her daughter, Charlotte, was a very pretty creature, and as like her mother as it was possible for a girl of twenty to be like a woman of fifty; moreover she was the heiress *par excellence* of the neighbourhood. Yet still, the long-descended acres which, together with the continuance of the old name to which they belonged, were to be hers at the death of her mother, were not of sufficient extent to compromise the superiority of Colonel Dermont; for whereas his land happily produced him an annual return of three thousand eight hundred per annum, Mrs. Verepoint's estate, which bore the old-fashioned appellation of "The Grange," never produced above two thousand. Had it not been for this inferiority of rent-roll, it would, to say the truth, have been impossible for either colonel or Mrs. Dermont to have loved and admired their neighbours at "The Grange" so cordially as they certainly did; but as it was, they certainly stood in higher favour with the family at the Mount, than any other in the whole list of their visiting

acquaintance, and it is impossible to give a greater proof of this, than the fact that the colonel and his lady, had more than once, when in sacred *tête-à-tête* discussion on the future destinies of their matchless son, confessed to each other that they should be by no means displeased, if it happened that Alfred took a fancy to her, to receive Charlotte Verepoint as his wife.

To return, however, to the homely epithet of "comfortable," by which I have taken the liberty of describing the residence of Mrs. Verepoint and her daughter, I must beg to prove its correctness, endeavouring to give some idea of the place; it shall be done as briefly as I can, good reader—but I must describe it, because I have seen it so often, loved it so well, and remember it so distinctly.

The first peculiarity of the old mansion was its being surrounded on three sides, that is to say, on the north, east, and west, by a grove of ancient oak trees, which spoke as plainly as the one bit of parchment which con-

stituted all its title deeds, the antiquity of the venerable domicile. It was well perhaps for the tranquillity of good Colonel Dermont's mind, that he had no judgment as to the age of oak-trees when he looked at them, and he therefore felt no ancestral pangs at his heart, when comparing the sycamore, beech, and acacia groves which surrounded his own gay-looking mansion with the rich Druidical sort of solemnity that enveloped the dark gray abode of his quiet neighbour.

But this dark gray abode, had an old long library at the back of it, with three old-fashioned bay windows looking out upon a well-shaven lawn, that had been stolen from the oaks by the father of the late Mr. Verepoint. No later alterations however, had been made upon it. It was not cut up for flower-beds or flower-baskets, but stretched its green carpet on all sides, exactly as far as the majestic oaks would permit ; the pleasure paths, which wandered away in various

directions among them not being visible from the windows of the library.

But delicious both in winter and summer as was the solemn stillness of this venerable grove, the room itself would have been far less "comfortable" had not a broad vista, cut through it towards the west, let in upon its windows the warmth and the glory of the setting sun. At the west side of each bay window was a flourishing myrtle-tree, which rarely required any warmer winter clothing than the dead leaves the sheltering oaks afforded. None but very young gardeners fancy that the sunshine of a southern exposure is favourable to their pets. The protection of such a grove, as I have described, is a thousand-fold more salutary.

All libraries are *comfortable*, unless they are absurdly unlibrary-like, which Mrs. Verepoint's was not; and therefore I shall say no more about it, but immediately go up stairs to the drawing-room, for the mansion was old enough to have "its *upper* rooms swept and

garnished" for the reception of company. The aspect of this room was due south, and the view it looked upon was such as the eye of modern taste would condemn as "hideous;" for the only alteration that had been made during the last two hundred and fifty years in the old paved court in front, was the contriving to make a carriage entrance at the side, which enabled the comers and goers to enter in that commodious invention, a coach, without having to walk a distance of two hundred yards from the pomegranites which were trained on each side of the door steps, to the two great bay trees that stood beside the stately stone pillars, supporting the enormous iron gates at the entrance. This alteration was very *comfortable*, but the aspect of the approach was very little changed thereby; for the road leading from the outrageously lofty old arch at the entrance of the little porch, to the iron gates above-mentioned, was still as straight as the flight of an arrow, and the stone-paved court itself, extending across the whole front of

the house, notwithstanding the massive and handsome granite balustrade which surrounded it, was likely enough to appear to most people as little picturesque as possible.

But those who found no pleasure in looking out of the windows, could hardly fail of finding consolation if they looked within; for they would find there books and flowers, and easy chairs, and soft sofas, and sliding tables, that would either fly at a touch, or stand steadily on all their legs at once, and plenty of foot-stools, and chessmen, and cards, and miniatures, and annuals, and albums, and shade and mignonette in summer, and a good fire and a folding screen in winter, and a good grand piano-forte, and a fine old violin into the bargain, and a space of forty feet long, which by its height and width produced a double cube. Such was the room; and an elderly lady whose sweet voice spake cordial welcome on one side of it, and a pretty girl smiling an echo to it on the other; and all this was exceedingly comfortable, to say the very least of it. But in case I have

not already sufficiently proved the claims of Mrs. Verepoint's mansion to this pleasant epithet, I must beg leave to say a word or two of the dining-parlour. This was immediately under the drawing-room, but was neither so long nor so high. It was, however a capital dining-room, and capital were the frequent little small party dinners that were given there. Excepting the fine old plate on the sideboard, there was, however, less of display at Mrs. Verepoint's dinners than at any other in the neighbourhood; but then at no other house was every thing so peculiarly good of its kind; nowhere were the viands served so hot with plates to match them, nowhere were sauces so perfect, nowhere were the wines so old, nowhere was the attendance so carefully proportioned to the number to be waited on, and nowhere was there such an absence of cold wind in winter, or intrusive sunbeams in summer; and, moreover, the room was so thickly carpeted, up to the very edges on all sides, that the most creaking shoe that ever footman

wore might walk about with impunity. Now all this I consider as very comfortable, and for this reason gave I this unassuming epithet to Mrs. Verepoint's house.

"This is something quite new, mamma," said the young lady on being made acquainted with the contents of the note. "How do you think you shall like it?"

"It will depend a good deal upon the weather, Charlotte," replied Mrs. Verepoint, "if they are lucky enough to have a fine day, I think it may be very pleasant."

"I rather wonder, they did not postpone so great a novelty till next year," said Charlotte, "when the son and heir will be of age. Alfred Dermont, you know, is exactly two months older than I am."

"There is something rather sentimental, Charlotte, in the sound of that observation," said her mother; "and, by the way, it reminds me of what Mrs. Beaumont said yesterday, which I had quite forgotten to tell you. She called, you know, while you were riding; and she entertained me during half

the time she staid, by repeating all the news her son had heard at Overby the day he dined there. She says it is universally reported, that you are going to be married to Colonel Dermont's son," said Mrs. Verepoint.

"I do not think the report can be fairly termed universal, mamma," returned her daughter; "because I do not think that either you or I have said any thing about it. At least, I am sure I can answer for myself."

Her mother laughed. "Then you honestly confess the truth of it, my dear?" said she, "only you have not talked about it."

"Pray, mamma, spare my blushes!" cried Charlotte, concealing her pretty face with her hand.

"You are a spoiled child, Charlotte," said the mother, "or you would not venture to jest upon so serious a subject with me. You know, as well I do, my dear, that Mr. Alfred Dermont may be considered as about the best match in the county, and I do really believe, that many of our neighbours think you are to marry him."

“ To tell you the truth, mamma, I do not very well see how we can help marrying,” replied Charlotte. “ You say that he is the best match in the county. Old Hannah is constantly saying the same of me. That clearly proves that we should be a proper match for each other. Next, we were born in the same parish, nay, in the same year; does not that prove that we were matched in Heaven? And now you have completed a triad of reasons for our being united, by telling me that I am a spoiled child. Is not the handsome Alfred a spoiled child too? And are not these, altogether, quite reasons enough for us to set about being married as quickly as possible?”

“ Why, to tell you the truth, Charlotte, I think one of the resemblances you mention, is greatly against the match! I think you are four or five years too old for him,” said Mrs. Verepoint.

“ Oh! cruel mother!” exclaimed Charlotte. “ What a moment you have chosen for reproaching me with my age! And you

really think, then, that I ought to give up all hopes of marrying Alfred Dermont?"

"I am not quite sure about it," returned her mother, gravely. "But, at least, I am fully prepared to assure you, that if this be *not* an objection, I really am not aware that there is any whatever."

"Indeed!" said Charlotte; "sits the wind in that quarter, mother?"

"Of course, my dear, I speak with very little serious meaning, as I have no reason whatever to believe, that any such idea has ever entered the heads of our good friends at the Mount," returned her mother.

"Well, mamma, I confess, I think that is rather a reason against our settling the affair any further. Nevertheless, mother mine, I presume you do not mean to refuse this *déjeuner à la fourchette*?"

"Most assuredly not, my daughter—for I think it will be both new and agreeable," said Mrs. Verepoint.

"Well then, mamma, if you decide upon going, I have a great favour to ask of you."

“Speak on, Charlotte. What is it?”

“Of course, you know, the invitations will include all the neighbourhood, and it has come into my head, that poor Miss Marsh will be greatly at a loss how to get there.”

“And you want me to take her, I suppose?” said Mrs. Verepoint. “It is very good-natured of you, Charlotte, to think of it, and the more so because you do not like her—and I shall have no objection I am sure. She certainly could not walk, and I fear it is only too certain, that her poor brother would hardly be justified in hiring a carriage to take her. I only wish that it were not so much out of the way. We shall have to go over exactly two sides of a triangle, you know.”

“Nay, mamma, but if you do it at all, I want you to do it with more effectual kindness than that. I want you to ask them to dine here the day before, and then Sophy can dress Miss Celestina’s hair for her, and prevent her looking such a preposterous figure, as she generally does.”

“ Upon my word, Charlotte, that is being very good-natured indeed, and I confess I think it will be a prodigious bore, to be followed about all day, by that particularly disagreeable young woman. For, of course, if she is to be staying here, and go with us, she will consider herself as being of our party.”

Charlotte was silent for a moment, before she answered, and then said, “ I don’t think she would trouble us much. However, if it will be disagreeable to you to grant my request, dear mother, I withdraw it.”

“ No, no, you shall not withdraw it, Charlotte—for you are right, and I am wrong. I will only make one condition in granting it, which is, that if we have the sister, we should have the brother too. I like him as much as I dislike her ; so I will myself write a note to desire they will both come to us the day before, and remain with us till the day after the *fête*. But this does not seem to please you, my dear. You look exactly as if you were going to cry about it.

If I did not know you too well, to believe you could be so *missish*, I might really suppose, that you had some scruples about having such an undashing squire in your train. Is it any such thought as this, which has clouded the serenity of your brow, Charlotte?"

Miss Verepoint coloured so violently upon being asked this question, that her mother could not help suspecting that she had touched the right chord, and felt a little vexed that her high-minded and unsophisticated daughter could be affected by so contemptible a feeling; and then, rather thinking aloud, than intending to express the thought, she added, "But, I suppose all girls must have, more or less, of this paltry feeling, till they have lived long enough to look out on life sufficiently to comprehend, and appreciate, the stuff of which their fellow-creatures are made."

The thought itself, or the manner in which it was worded, seemed either to please, or arouse the young lady; for the

shade passed from her brow, and she smiled with all her usual gaiety of expression, as she replied, "I believe girls are great fools, mamma, in a hundred ways ; but I do not choose you should delude yourself as to the nature of my particular folly, and therefore I beg leave to observe, that I am a vast deal more likely to remember, that the blood of the Tremaynes can be traced to a more ancient date than that of the blooming Captain Smith, or the exquisitely elegant Lieutenant Tomkins, than that George Marsh's black coat is beginning to look a little rusty."

"I am glad to hear it, Charlotte," returned her mother ; forgetting, in the pleasure of listening to so very congenial a sentiment, the still unexplained cloud which had passed over the sweet face of her daughter.

"Now, then, to our pens," continued Mrs. Verepoint, rising, and approaching the commodious table, which accommodated the well-appointed drawing-room writing desks

of herself and her daughter. "You, Charlotte, shall write the note of acceptance to Mrs. Dermont's invitation, and I, that of invitation to the Marshes."

CHAPTER VII.

As to all the other threescore and ten invitations which were scattered far and wide in all directions within the county of —, I will not trouble either my reader or myself by dwelling on them. I have already given, what I flatter myself will be found very graphic descriptions of the effect produced by those addressed to the three nearest neighbours of the Dermont family; and this must suffice as an introduction to their society for the present. In point of vicinity, indeed, the honoured individuals selected from the town of Overby might raise a fair claim to competition with both Locklow Wood and the Grange; but I feel quite

certain that, were I to trust myself among my well-remembered old acquaintances, the Murrays, the Morrisises, and the Kersleys of Overby, I should fill a very unreasonable number of pages in describing them. One little observation, from the youngest daughter of the half-pay veteran, Major Murray, I will give, because it conveys in a short space a just and general idea of the tone of feeling which existed between the county and the county town.

“Here is a marvel!” exclaimed the eldest sister, entering the apartment of the younger, with Mrs. Dermont’s invitation in her hand. “What wonderful miracle have the sun, moon, and stars been performing for us? Look you here, Miss Janet! An invitation to a *déjeuner à la fourchette*, from those greatest of all grandees, the Dermonts! What can have produced this extraordinary condescension?”

“Charming!” exclaimed the youngest sister. “And won’t I dance with Captain Waters! But as to the miraculous part of

the business, I can explain it in a moment, and most satisfactorily. You know that three-cornered bit of ground by the side of the kitchen door, which was formerly entirely devoted to the drying of Old Maggy's pans and platters? During your visit to Aunt Macfarlane, I coaxed papa into making over to me the fee simple of that part and parcel of his Overby estate. And if you, Miss Kattie, had not been so altogether occupied by the tender attentions of Ensign Jones, from the very first day of your return to the present hour, you would have perceived—which I know you have not—that I have given to the domain such an air of rurality, by the wall-flowers, sweet peas, and double stocks, which are flourishing there, as, I have long thought, ought to secure our being classed as a *county family*, instead of leaving us still included in the fatal phrase of '*Overby people*.' I am happy to see that my improvements have produced their proper effect ; and I hope you feel grateful to me for having relieved you from the mar-

ket-town odium, from which not even the name of Murray could save you."

* * * * *

In fact, such an invitation as that which had issued from the Mount, was not likely to be met in any quarter by a refusal; and when the arithmetical process of counting noses had been carefully performed, which it was in succession by all the members of the Mount family, Julia Drummond included, it became rather alarmingly evident that there was no room in the house, notwithstanding its very handsome proportions, which could permit the whole party to sit down together to the banquet.

The drawing-room, indeed, might from its width, have admitted a double row of tables, each long enough to accommodate about forty persons; but when this was suggested by the two young people, the colonel and his lady both started as if a bucket of cold water had been thrown over them. Had the proposal proceeded from Julia alone, it would probably have been treated

as a symptom of incipient delirium, consequent upon the fever excited by the prospect of the fête, and she might possibly have been sent to bed, with a cup of water-gruel and a few grains of antimony; but the companionship of Alfred saved her from this; and the enormity of introducing preparations for positive substantial eating, with all the atrocious accompaniments of flying champagne corks, possible spillings of claret, and the like, into the most elegant drawing-room in the county, was only treated as a gay effusion, indulged in by the young people as a joke.

Colonel and Mrs. Dermont, indeed, exchanged a glance, in which something like horror might have been seen to mingle; but they speedily recovered themselves, and replied at the same moment, and almost in the same words, that it was no good to joke about it, but that very seriously they must contrive some plan or other by which at least all the ladies, and a portion of the gentlemen, could be accommodated with seats.

Alfred laughed, and Julia coloured at perceiving how very little their proposal was approved; but Colonel Dermont prevented the probable efforts on the part of the young gentleman to defend it, by saying eagerly, "I will tell you what we must do, and I only wonder that it did not occur to me at first. When it was feared that the riotous propensities of some of our neighbours were likely to lead to serious risings, orders were forwarded to the troops at Overby and two or three other towns near us, to prepare for an encampment on Sunbury Common. I know that all the marquees are ready, and the best thing we can do will be to borrow Major Sommerton's, and one or two others from Captain Waters, perhaps, or Captain Smith. Nothing looks so gay and picturesque as tents pitched upon a lawn; and with the military band stationed among the trees to the left, the effect will be beautiful."

The whole party agreed that it was the very cleverest thought in the world; and another expedition was immediately planned

for the two gentlemen to Overby, to open a negotiation with the commanding officer for the marquees and the music.

Even if Colonel Dermont had not been *the* Colonel Dermont, who had so much distinguished himself in India as to have been very nearly killed, Major Sommerton, as well as every officer under his command, would have been only too happy to do all they could to promote so very agreeable a scheme; but, as it was, the whole thing was received with a degree of enthusiasm which was exceedingly gratifying to the dignified proprietor of the Mount, and the consequence was, that on his part, as well as on that of his ever sympathising lady, exertions were made to render the fête one of the most brilliant ever witnessed in the neighbourhood. Preparations upon a large scale can never be made in so quiet a region as Stoke, without creating a strong sensation in the public mind. Expectation was on tiptoe. Mr. Sims, the principal farmer on the estate, was deputed by his neighbours to petition that the

wives and families of the tenants might have leave to place themselves within the park gates, that they might witness the arrival of the company; which permission being most graciously accorded, the price of ribbons and paper flowers rose considerably at Overby; nor was Miss Celestina Marsh the only one of the invited guests who intended to make a point of spending a little more than she ought, in order to do honour to the generous givers of so brilliant an entertainment.

Another result of the convulsion of spirits into which the whole country side was thrown by this remarkable event, was a wonderful variety of divinations as to the cause which had produced it. Some were strongly of opinion that it was given in compliment to Lady Ripley's niece, the beautiful Miss Thorwold, whose charms had produced so evident an effect on the young heir of the Mount at the last Overby assize ball. Another party had their own particular reasons for believing that the fête was given for the purpose of publicly announcing to the neigh-

bourhood the engagement of Alfred Dermont and Charlotte Verepoint—which had, in fact, been settled between the parents, they said, from within a few months of the birth of the children. But all this was only county talk. The gossips of the town said they knew better, and that the only reason why “the Dermonts” were going to give an entertainment so much out of the common way of their very regularly organised hospitality was, that they might receive all the officers together, and that in a manner that would be sure to please them—which every body knew would not be the case (the Overby young ladies observed), if an entertainment were given to them in the usually exclusive style of county visiting, as every body knew there was not a single officer in the corps—excepting Major Sommerton, who was as formal as a judge, and any thing but young,—who had not lost his heart to an Overby beauty.

In short, the conversations which began and ended, without involving a discussion on the

approaching fête at the Mount, during the fortnight which preceded it, were confined, solely and wholly, to the itinerant beggars who were prevented by the local authorities from remaining long enough in the neighbourhood to learn even the names of the inhabitants. Every thing went on smoothly. The ladies, and the ladies' maids, the little mantua makers and the small milliners, all seemed absolutely inspired. The lightest and most becoming caps, were made to simulate the out-of-door costume of hats, while transparent bonnets mimicked the wings of the gossamer, and floating gauze enveloped pretty shoulders like a mantle, without doing any mischief to their beauty at all.

The only *contretemps* of any great importance which occurred in the whole neighbourhood, was the unexpected arrival of a guest at the house of Mr. Stephens. The first thought, both of that gentleman and of his lady, when this visiter arrived was, that this very untoward circumstance would prevent their participating in the festivities to

which they, as well as their less philosophical neighbours, had been looking forward with extraordinary satisfaction. But when they retired to arrange their dresses for dinner, Mrs. Stephens announced to her husband in a tone of very firm decision, that she was quite determined not to lose the fête.

Mr. Stephens sighed. "Well, then, sweetest!" he replied, in gentle accents, "well then!—you must order a comfortable little dinner for me and Mr. Holingsworth, and we must console ourselves during your absence as well as we can."

"You quite mistake me, Liebe," returned the newly-married wife. "How could you imagine for a moment, that I could find pleasure where thou wert not?—No, no; my scheme is a very different one. I neither intend to give up the party myself, nor to leave you out of it, Liebe; but I intend to drive over to the Mount to-morrow morning, in order to inform the family of the arrival

of our guest, and to obtain an invitation for him."

"Indeed!" cried Mr. Stephens, looking a little frightened—for the early habits of Mr. Stephens had not been such as to render him familiar with much society, and this proposal struck him as being more courageous than prudent; a feeling which he did not scruple to confess, adding as a reason for it, "You know, sweetest, that they are considered as the proudest people in the county."

"That others may find them so, is likely enough, Liebe," returned Mrs. Stephens, with a charming smile; "but there are two or three reasons, you know, why there is no great danger that any such feeling should be exhibited to me. Every one knows, I presume, that my paternal inheritance was rather a remarkably large one; a circumstance which I fear in our degenerate days disposes the world in general to be only too much at our feet; and though I am aware,"—and here Mrs. Stephens cast her eyes

upon the floor—"and though I am aware, Liebe, that I have been, and still may be, blamed by the sordid and narrow-minded multitude for having selected you from out the world as the dear companion and sharer of my wealth, I shall ever feel that the peculiarly exalted intellectual tie which unites us (without alluding to the more ordinary sources of passion, which of course we feel in common with others), I shall ever, I say, feel that this unison of two souls who have both drunk deeply, as we have done, at the eternal fountain of philosophy, has rendered our union as much a source of mutual pride, as of mutual happiness. And therefore, I fear not in any society to assert the species of pre-eminence to which I was born, nor shall I ever scruple to take those little social liberties with my neighbours, which are permitted to people of consequence, though denied to others."

This exalted manner of speaking and thinking was not now displayed for the first time to the admiring eyes of the favoured

and happy husband; and he therefore only seized the lady's hand and kissed it, without saying any thing in reply beyond his usual gentle phrase, "Do just as you will with me, sweetest."

At breakfast on the following morning, Mrs. Stephens took occasion to mention to their friend Mr. Holingsworth, who was an American of great literary endowments, recently arrived from the United States, both the brilliant fête which was about to take place, and her purpose of paying a visit at the house where it was to be given, in order to obtain an invitation for him.

"And that is a very obliging notion I expect, madam, and I hold it to be very handsome of you," replied Mr. Holingsworth. "Yet I can't but opinionate, too," he added, after a moment's reflection, "that it would be a better scheme still for us to start off, all of us together, for the object of getting the invite. I most times remark that we Yankees carry with us a good deal of influence, and I guess that the seeing and

hearing the individual what is to be invited, when characteristics all convene, as on the present occasion, as may be spoken, I calculate, without vanity, is the style most likely to obtain the end proposed. And if this should be approbated by you, madam, and prove in conclusion as much your sentiment as it is my own, I should beg leave to propose that you introduce me forthwith to the genteel friends you speak of. Always supposing that my honourable friend, Mr. William Stephens here, sees no objection."

Mrs. Stephens was somewhat of a leohunting personage in a small way; and as she had never chanced to have the good fortune of introducing either a Turk, a Laplander, or even a Greek to any of her friends, though she was too well-informed a person not to know that it was extremely genteel to do so; it suddenly struck her that, as they were not in London, but in quite a remote country place, she might take the tone of conferring a favour, instead of asking one; and with this clever device in her

thoughts, she immediately answered, with a most amiable smile, "Your proposal is a great improvement upon mine, Mr. Holingsworth, and as to my excellent husband, you will learn, when you have seen a little more of us, that he knows not what it is to have a wish or a will, save as he receives both from the eyes of her he loves."

"Possible?" returned the naïve American; who, though a married man himself, uttered the word in an accent that certainly expressed surprise.

However, Mr. Stephens most frankly corroborated the statement of his lady, ending his exemplary speech by saying, with a glance of extreme tenderness, "How is it possible that it should be otherwise?"

The smart little one-horse chariot, which held two insides, and one or more, if necessary, on the dickey behind, was then ordered to be at the door precisely at one o'clock, which was an hour almost certain to insure the agreeable "coincidence," as Mrs. Stephens called it, of finding "the

Dermonts" at luncheon, to which meal 'all morning visitors at the Mount, who timed their visits well, were always invited.

The interval between breakfast and setting out upon this visit was spent by the three highly enlightened individuals of whom I have been speaking, in a state of great intellectual enjoyment. The two gentlemen placed themselves one on each side of a table, on which were many books, most of of them unbound, many from the United States, and all displaying such an aspect of what Mrs. Stephens called "appetizing freshness of intellectual food," as could not fail to make even the most superficial examination of them profitable.

Mrs. Stephens watched them, as they thus disposed of themselves, with an approving smile, and drawing her little work-table close to the side of her husband, she gave him another and a very intelligent smile as she opened its drawer, and drew forth her favourite work, saying, "Now then, begin reading scraps, and talking about them,

my dear friends, and you have no notion how rapidly I shall work. Methinks my needle partakes of the nature of the fabled pigeons, and spreads its wings, and flies at the touch of soul-inspiring thought !”

“That’s as like, as like can be, ma’am,” returned the American, “to some of the fine poetical compositions that I get in my monthly receipt-à-cle from the pens of my fair countrywomen. In the article of female inspiration, we progress in double quick time, I promise you; and it’s only, I expect, such ladies as yourself, who neither scruple nor fear to profess that degree of intellectual freedom as properly belongs to the Unitarian persuasion, as can fully realise, and mix-in like, with the superiority of the American female.”

Mrs. Stephens raised her eyes from her work, and fixed them with an immense deal of rather mysterious expression on the face of her husband.

“Yes, sweetest, I understand that dear glance well,” said Mr. Stephens, “and I shall

not scruple to interpret it to our excellent transatlantic friend, Mr. Holingsworth. The fact is, Mr. Holingsworth," he continued, stretching out his hand across the sofa table, and laying it on the arm of the American, "the fact is, that I was brought up as a clergyman of the Church of England, and of course I have the greatest possible respect for the Establishment and all that. But this dear angel here, has crept into my head as well as my heart, and I will not deny that she has emancipated my intellect from a vast deal of rubbish with which education had encumbered it. The writings of many of your countrymen, my good friend, have done much to complete the work, and I can no longer resist the conviction, that every human being who wishes to think, to reason, and to judge for himself, ought to become an Unitarian."

"Upon my word, Mr. Stephens, sir, I expect that I might stop from July to eternity, before I could hope to hear a gentleman deliver his opinion more elegant than you have

done at this present speaking. What you have now delivered is first-rate truth, sir, you may be availed of that; and if you have got to thank your lady for having wiped your mind clean from all the rust and dust, that your bishops and archbishops, and your deans and your prebends, are for everlasting heaping up about those who will bide and bear them, why I must say that if her will and wishes govern your will and wishes, it is no more than what it ought to be—seeing that in this great matter she has shown herself so considerable the superior—which is what, in the common way, we don't approbate allowing to the female—except just upon the American Parnasus."

"Fine spirits have fine issues, Mr. Holingsworth!" replied the newly-fledged Unitarian. "Did you know my charming, my admirable Arabella more intimately, you would be aware that, in her case at least, the female soul is fabricated of a vastly finer material than it is possible for that of man to be."

"Well, now," returned Mr. Holingsworth

a little doubtingly, "I expect it would take a pretty considerable time to make me go entirely the whole hog as to that. But nevertheless I realise quite altogether, sir, the obligation you owe to the female in this instance, and I feel noways surprised at your being kinder-like overcome by it."

That no probabilities may seem to be violated by the rather peculiar language of Mr. Holingsworth, and its appearing to pass current as that of an accomplished gentleman in the judgment of so educated a pair as Mr. and Mrs. Stephens, it may be advisable to mention that this gentleman had been introduced to them by a letter from a well-known publisher in the United States, as an individual of very considerable importance in the transatlantic literary world. He was, in fact, no less a person than the editor of the celebrated Arch-Anti-Episcopal Review and Magazine, a monthly publication, considered by many who contributed to it as one of the most enlightened and valuable periodicals which had as yet appeared either

in the Union or out of it. All American editors do not, most assuredly, indulge as freely in the rich peculiarities of transatlantic idiom as Mr. Holingsworth, nor did the majority of the articles in the Arch-Anti-Episcopal appear to proceed from precisely the same font as that from whence he drew both his inspiration and his phraseology. Mr. Holingsworth was a native of New Hampshire; his father had been a pork-butcher, and his mother kept a small lodging-house. His first personal attempt at "getting along," was in the line of his father; but being rather clumsy in the use of his tools, he cut his thumb, which occasioned his "quitting" that profitable line of business for ever. He next devoted himself to the preparation and sale of tripe, and having met with considerable success in this line, ambition prompted him again to "change his hand," though not to "check his pride," for he now employed his little capital in the porter trade. This business likewise favoured him so much, that he was wont to say his

very success obliged him to abandon it; for his capital would not suffice for the enlarged custom which presented itself. He therefore, with a degree of wisdom which might truly be said to be in advance of his age, disposed of his porter brewery to a physician, whose practice left him sufficient leisure to attend to it, and having by this time acquired a strong literary bias, not only from the nature of the various occupations in which he had been engaged, but also from having fallen into the habit of attending more than one of those admirable debating societies in which so many of the gentlemen of the United States complete their education, he proposed himself as partner to a celebrated bookseller and publisher at New York. The money which it was suspected he had made in business, and the talents which it was known he had displayed in debating, convinced the judicious publisher that he would do well to accept his offer. As time wore on, the literary propensities of Mr. Holingsworth strengthened, till at length

he conceived, and executed, the project of editing a periodical. The circumstance of his being himself a publisher, was of course highly advantageous to the publication, and the Arch-Anti-Episcopal made money. But neither Mr. Holingsworth nor his partner were men likely to let grass grow under their feet from any deficiency in the active get-along principle. Bookselling, publishing, and editing, did not altogether furnish occupation enough for the active spirit of Mr. Holingsworth, and accordingly it was settled between him and his almost equally active partner, that he should take a trip to the "old country," for the purpose of obtaining from such authors there, as had the honour and glory of being known by reputation in the United States, the promise of an early copy of their works for transatlantic republication. This was the cause of Mr. Holingsworth's visit to England, and such the history of his past life.

Though the preparations for the fête were already going on with great activity,

in almost every part of the grounds and mansion at the Mount, Mrs. Dermont herself would have been greatly shocked, had she not been found as usual in the composed possession of her drawing-room. Neither Albert's wild proposal of converting it into an eating-room, nor any other of the necessary *derangements* consequent upon so extensive a reception, had been permitted to invade this elegant retreat; and there sat Mrs. Dermont, when Mr. and Mrs. Stephens and their American friend entered, the very picture of elegant repose, though every other individual in the family was in a bustle.

All the men servants, with the colonel and Alfred to assist them, were busily employed in erecting upon the lawn three tents, which had been borrowed from the officers; Julia, with Mrs. Dermont's maid to help her, was working with indefatigable perseverance upon unnumbered yards of calico, white, pink, blue, yellow, and crimson, which by the aid of wire, she was converting, with marvellous skill, into roses and lilies with-

out end, the which, being combined with abundance of evergreens, were intended to hang in graceful wreaths about the white drapery of the tents.

The housekeeper, the cook, the scullion, laboured from morn to dewy eve, in the production of every imaginable variety of delicate prettinesses, both sweet and savoury. The dairy-maid was inventing all sorts of contrivances to make her cool dairy cooler still, for the preservation of incredible quantities of cream. The gardener was hoarding his ripe strawberries, by sheltering his beds from the superfluous sun. The butler's pantry was locked, and double locked, to secure the plate which had, to the last ounce, been drawn forth from its strong hold, to abide a general polishing; and, in short, there was no other corner of the establishment, in which there might not be heard, or seen, some symptom of preparation.

Happily, however, for the feelings of Mrs. Dermont, one of the men servants, engaged in the operations going forward, upon the

lawn, most fortunately caught sight of Mr. Stephens's carriage as it approached the house ; and although he was, at the moment, in the act of assisting his master in fastening a stretching peg in the ground, he had sufficient presence of mind to prove his interest in the honour of the family, by instantly dropping his hammer, and exclaiming, " a carriage, sir !" darted off, catching up his livery coat as he ran—and thereby was enabled, though a good deal out of breath, to announce, " Mr. and Mrs. Stephens," in a style befitting the dignity of the Mount.

Mrs. Dermont certainly, at that moment, felt very thankful that she had steadily refused the entreaties of Julia, " only to cut out a few leaves." It was from no feelings of harshness towards her that she had done so. On the contrary, she had cut out many the evening before, when doors and windows being closed for the night, she had felt there was no danger of being caught in the fact of performing a mechanical operation, to assist

the preparations for her own fête. Nothing could be more lady-like and tranquilly idle, than the manner in which she was now found sitting in her elegant drawing-room, fabricating, with a pretty mother-of-pearl crochet, a purse for Alfred, in the most delicate shades of green and lavender colour. She felt conscious, that notwithstanding the multitudinous labours, which she well knew were going on in all directions round her, she *did* look lady-like and idle ; and this consciousness made the arrival of her new neighbours an agreeable event, inasmuch, as it effectually proved that, however differently things might be managed by the minor magnates of the neighbourhood, the establishment at the Mount sufficed to produce a fête, magnificent enough to astonish the neighbourhood, without deranging the elegant repose of its mistress for a moment.

Mrs. Dermont had not hitherto quite made up her mind whether to like, or dislike, the newly-arrived occupants of Beech-hill. She

greatly approved their moving the vulgar old posts and rails which formerly surrounded the lawn, and replacing them by so very light and neat an iron fence. But she did not quite like the free and easy style in which Mrs. Stephens overhauled all the neatly-bound annuals upon the drawing-room table, the very first time they had dined at the Mount; nor did she quite relish the sort of patronising tone in which she had said, on the same occasion, that if any of the family were readers they should be perfectly welcome to dip into the treasures of Mr. Stephens's library, which she rather believed they would find a good deal out of the common way. There was something in the notion that the family at the Mount could want to borrow any thing of any body, which rather grated on Mrs. Dermont's feelings. But then, on the other hand, Mr. Stephens's manner of expressing his admiration of the house, grounds, drawing-room, dining-room, dinner-table, side-board, and various other parts and parcels of the numerous elegances

displayed at the Mount, was so very gentleman-like and pleasing, that she felt it was impossible to doubt his having been in very good company—and that was a great point with Mrs. Dermont. But then again there was something a little too much like a tone of equality in Mr. Stephens's manner of saying that they only waited till the smell of paint had left the dining-room, in order to fix a day for seeing the Mount family; as if it were so perfectly a matter of certainty that the Mount family would go wherever they were asked. However, there was something, as I have said, extremely soothing to the feelings of Mrs. Dermont in being thus found in such a state of philosophically aristocratic composure just two days before the fête, the prospect of which, she well knew, had put all the neighbourhood in confusion; and this pleasing sensation caused her to receive Mr. and Mrs. Stephens, and their rather odd-looking friend, with very smiling politeness.

Mrs. Dermont was not one of the people

who thought it right and proper to shake hands with every body, but she now gave the tips of four fingers to Mrs. Stephens, and one might almost say her whole hand to Mr. Stephens, and listened to their announcement of Mr. Holingsworth's name almost as if she did not feel surprised at their taking the liberty of bringing him. Mrs. Stephens, however, was too clever a woman not to remember that it would be exceedingly important to her enjoyment of the approaching fête that Mrs. Dermont should not only permit Mr. Holingsworth to accompany them, but that his doing so should be considered as a compliment, and not a liberty. She greatly disliked the idea of being treated with any thing like coldness by the first people in the neighbourhood, when all the rest were there to witness it, and it was therefore with her very best skill that she now set about the business in hand.

It was not very often that Mrs. Stephens resorted to any thing save her intellectual superiority where she was bent upon making

a particularly favourable impression, but she thought she could not quite trust to this at present, and therefore, while her husband and the New-York publisher walked away to a distant window, in order to admire the fine trees, and the very green grass which grew under them, Mrs. Stephens drew a chair close to the sofa on which the lady of the house was seated, and thus addressed her. "It is probable, my dear Mrs. Dermont, that you are not yet acquainted with the name of Holingsworth, because in fact he is but recently arrived in England, but I should really feel wanting in duty to myself, to you, to the colonel, and to your highly-gifted son, if I failed to make you acquainted with the fact, that he is one of the most celebrated men who have visited England for many years. His principal object in visiting the country is that he may judge by personal observation and his own experience, of the general tone of manners of the English aristocracy, before he publishes his great work on the general aspect of society throughout Europe.

Can you wonder, my dear lady, that knowing this, we should be anxious to bring him here? Can you wonder that we should be delighted to obtain permission for him to be present at your fête on Thursday? or that, above all, we should be deeply anxious that he should not leave Stoke, without having been introduced to your son?"

This last hint in particular arose from what Mrs. Stephens was accustomed to designate as her *practical metaphysics*. She particularly piqued herself upon having studied with success the nature of the human soul, and she not unfrequently proved, as in the present instance, that she really did know something about it, for Mrs. Dermont, though a good deal inclined to be stiff to new people in general, relaxed at once on hearing these moving and most judicious words, and replied, exactly in the well-pleased tone which the philosophical lady expected to hear, that both the colonel and herself would be extremely happy to see the gentlemen with them on Thursday.

This important offer being happily accomplished, Mrs. Stephens again made a practical use of her metaphysical studies, saying, "That having thus performed her duty to her country in general, and her kind neighbours in particular, by not suffering such an opportunity to be lost of showing England to advantage to the distinguished traveller, they must now take their leave, as their next duty was to show him the magnificent view of the colonel's house and grounds as seen from the upper road to Overby." Had there been any chance of luncheon, Mrs. Stephens would have run the risk of letting the "celebrated foreigner" display to the whole family of the Dermont's assembled, the exquisite idiom of his Doric English. For Mrs. Stephens had a peculiarly strong partiality for a good luncheon, but as Mrs. Dermont had very civilly said, that she was sorry they had come too late for that repast; the gifted mistress of Beech Hill, thought it would be "wisest, discreetest," and therefore undeniably "best," not to run

any risk of the fine issues of his fine spirit being mistaken by the uninitiated family at the Mount for mere unsublimated Yankeeisms, and she therefore retreated to enjoy, with her beloved William in private, the outpourings of a philosophy too congenial to be rejected on account of any idiom whatever.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE important day arrived, as it was pretty sure to do; and moreover, which was not quite so certain, it arrived bright in sunshine, and with scarcely wind enough to wave the very lightest ringlet which was intended to wanton in its breath.

The hour appointed by the invitation cards for assembling was two, and before half an hour beyond it had worn itself away, the lawn at the Mount looked as gay as the somewhat undignified district around could make it. There were, as there always must be at every English "gathering," many very pretty young women. The seven red-coats from Overby illumined the various groups,

as planets illumine the heavens, when they shine out proudly amongst the lesser stars. Nor were there wanting a few really aristocratic-looking equipages, two of them having four horses, and one a goodly pair of outriders; which circumstances, trifling as they may appear to persons who "get such things often" between their lodge gates and their hall doors, were of very considerable importance, not only to Mrs. Dermont herself, but to a large proportion of her company. The officers were greatly pleased to see "the Oswalds" and "the Fitzwarringtons" arrive, because it would give them an opportunity of improving the acquaintance begun by the heads of these illustrious houses having left their cards at all their lodgings, but which had not yet advanced very far, from the circumstance of their having all been from home when this honour was done them. The Kersleys, the Murrays, and the Morrisises felt, as they watched the equipages advance, that it was exceedingly pleasant, and a great advantage to

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meet "the county people;" and the beautiful Miss Thorwold, and her elegant friend Mrs. Knight, told each other that it was really a comfort to see a few decent carriages.

Wise folks may laugh as much as they will about the folly and vanity of the fairer part of the creation, on account of their undisguised partiality to the military profession; but it is vain to deny that whenever and wherever any thing in the shape of a fête is going forward, the presence of its members is both useful and ornamental in the highest degree. That country young ladies, who rarely leave their native shades, should be pleased that a few additional eyes should come to look at them there, is extremely natural. "It is so happy," as I once heard a young German lady say, in her very piquant English; "it is so happy to look pretty!" And where is the class upon whom the necessity of making themselves agreeable acts so strongly as upon those who are for ever obliged to make their

home among strangers? And again; will not all the ladies agree in declaring, that among all the gentlemen presented to them at a country ball, or a country meeting of any sort, two-thirds of them, at the very least, are ill-dressed — an evil most enchantingly guarded against in the military by *regulation*. But beyond all else, perhaps, the neighbourhood of a party of military is a blessing to the givers of fêtes, by its power of bestowing a military band to assist it. Every body, gentlemen *almost* as much as ladies, declared upon the present occasion that the party would have been nothing without the band of the ——. And in truth, the band of the —— did make a great difference. Not all the fiddles ever provided at Overby, either for race or assize ball, with the pipe and tabor to boot, could have produced from behind the laurels so exhilarating an effect as did the wind instruments of the —— band. There must have been a very considerable knowledge of the nervous sys-

tem in those who first invented the fashion of rousing men up to fighting pitch by the sound of the trumpet; and it may be questioned, I think, if any animal ever listened to the startling, shrill, and thrilling cadence of wind instruments, without feeling the spirit roused thereby. Why such vibrations should produce such effects I have never heard explained, but that so it is, was never proved more satisfactorily, on a small scale, than at Mrs. Dermont's *déjeuner à la fourchette*. Mrs. Dermont herself, as she listened to the inspiring sounds, and watched the gay groups meandering upon the sun-and-shadow-chequered lawn, with measured step, and glances bright with enjoyment, felt as pleased and as proud as ever Juno did, when seated on a cloud beside the Thunderer, at some general roll-call of the gods, whereat she presided as acknowledged queen. The colonel snuffed the sweet air, and looked military. Alfred almost forgot to think about himself, and Julia positively looked pretty.

“Inspiring!” cried Mrs. Stephens, with a sort of electric glance at her young husband.

“Very fine indeed, ma’am,” said Mr. Holingsworth, who thought the word, being rather poetical, was addressed to him.

“How divinely beautiful!” exclaimed Janet Murray.

“It is like being in heaven!” returned her sister.

“Upon my word, my dear, this is enough to make one take a house in the country,” said Mrs. Kersley, who was conscious that they were doing exceedingly well in the world, and had as good a right to a lawn and a shrubbery as some of their county neighbours. “How full of spirits Dick looks, doesn’t he?—and upon my word and honour, I think Lavinia is the handsomest girl here.”

Old Mrs. Morris, the vicar’s widow, looked gayer and happier than she had done for half-a-dozen years before ; and her pretty delicate-looking daughter, when she saw En-

sign Wheeler offer his arm to conduct her infirm parent to a bench, where she could enjoy a perfect view of the scene, thought that this certainly was going to be the happiest day in her life. Even Mrs. Verepoint, though she did not quite approve the general style of the place, allowed that, just then, it certainly did look very pretty; and her daughter, Charlotte, totally forgot for the time being that Colonel Dermont always made her feel sleepy; that looking at Mrs. Dermont's erect stateliness, made her back ache; that Alfred, notwithstanding his beauty, was any thing but agreeable; and that Julia could hardly rank higher in creation than a mouse — having a soft-looking skin, a bright eye, a noiseless tread, and a strong propensity to run away and hide herself, if any body came near her. All this was considerably more than half owing to the effect of the military band; and were we to examine into the state of spirits of each individual of the eighty-seven there assembled, we should probably

not find one, who on first marching forward on that soft turf, to the sound of the unseen instruments, did not experience a sensation of *bien-être* and gaiety, which had its origin wholly and solely from them.

Were I a physician, my prescriptions would often have sonatas instead of solutions, and arias in the place of essences. But it will not do for me so completely to identify myself with my favourite Mrs. Stephens, as to pursue the "theory of oral vibrations" any further; I must, on the contrary, record one remarkable instance where this influence appeared to be totally unfelt; yet even here, perhaps, the insensibility did not arise from any deficiency, or uncertainty, in the marvellous powers of sound, but from the preponderance, in one instance at least, of that of sight. When Miss Celestina Marsh, stepping forth from the carriage of Mrs. Verepoint, and, following the steps of that lady through a gate which at once conducted them to the scene of action, beheld the bright assemblage of company

assembled there—of which a fair moiety were of the nobler sex, and seven of them clothed in scarlet—when she beheld this spectacle, her whole soul seemed to rush into her eyes.

Any one, indeed, who would have given himself the trouble of turning from the scene which so enchanted her, in order to trace in those round black eyes its particular effect upon her feelings, would have seen a fire, a glow, an ecstasy of delight, flashing from them, as they moved with supernatural rapidity from one point to another, which might have suggested the fear of excitement, approaching to delirium—for was not her Wheeler there?—did she not see him?—yes! despite the dazzling brightness of that moving throng, Celestina discovered him, ere half-a-dozen keen flashes from those wandering eyes had been darted forth in the search. And how did she find him occupied? Was he flirting with another? Were his steps, ever the surest echo in the dance to the gay sounds which

inspired it, were those dear steps now taken in graceful and harmonious accord with the notes of the brazen instruments, which sent forth their delicious words of command from behind the laurels!—No! the steps of her Wheeler were short, slow, uncertain, and every movement seemed constrained and awkward. Ah! Joy of joys!—it was an old, evidently a very old, or very infirm woman, upon whom he was in such close attendance! Her Wheeler was now performing what he doubtless felt to be a duty—the sweet office of rewarding him should be hers, when the moment came for exchanging the task of following the painful steps of decrepitude, for that of attending her own bounding movement through the dance; and as the thought arose, the happy Celestina looked down upon her satin shoes, and remembered, with a keen pulsation of delight, that though her feet were long, and her ankles not *very* slender, and though her person was in some respects rather bulky, she had energy of character and of muscle,

which not only sufficed to counteract these defects, but to bear her onward on the fantastic toe, with a pertinacity of vigour that few, or rather none, of her acquaintance could equal.

She remembered, too, every particular of her new and showy dress! With all these sources of abounding happiness and promised enjoyment at her heart, Miss Celestina Marsh curvetted on beside the tranquil Charlotte Verepoint, very like a great, unbroken Flanders colt, beside a dainty-paced little Arabian. Mr. Marsh, who, with Mrs. Verepoint on his arm, was a few steps in advance of his sister, perceived, with a glance as rapid as her own, that the young man whose *constancy of character* was of such vital importance to her existence, had arrived before them. But he saw also, which she did not, that the new gray bonnet which had superseded a more familiar black one, sheltered the head of the worthy Mrs. Morris!—he saw, too, that the pretty creature, her daughter, though at that mo-

ment engaged in conversation with Julia Drummond, was at no great distance behind; and all his unfortunate sister had confided to him respecting the gay ensign's suspected inconstancy, recurred to his mind. The young man's attention to Louisa's mother he thought more alarming than almost any degree of attention to herself could have been. "Alas!" thought he, "that looks as if he were really in earnest;" and he anxiously turned round his head to see how Celestina bore it. Equally to his pleasure and surprise, however, he perceived that she was evidently in a state of the most vehement enjoyment; but though heartily glad of this, there was something in the style and manner in which this happy state of spirits was displayed, set off too, as it was, by its contrast to the appearance and manner of her companion, that made him feel singularly ill at ease, and in the hope of making the party less conspicuous, he asked Mrs. Verepoint if she would not like to sit down?

“Certainly, Mr. Marsh,” she replied, “you shall escort me, if you please, to that bench yonder. Mrs. Morris is a great favourite with me; I shall like to sit down by her.”

This was not exactly the direction which George Marsh would have preferred ; but obedience was unavoidable, even though he heard a loud chuckle of delight from Celestina, who was now close behind him, and trembled as he anticipated the revulsion of spirits, which he thought likely to follow. But, although that young lady had now recognised the vicinity of “the hateful Morrisises,” her gaiety was not as yet checked thereby, for Louisa was dressed in the very plainest white muslin frock, that ever a young lady wore on such an occasion. Moreover, she had not had even the wit, as Miss Marsh herself would have expressed it, to have it made in the least bit, *décoleté*, and therefore, of course, “she looked like a fright.” Radiant in the wreath of red roses on the outside of her singularly small bonnet, and the wreath of red roses on the inside; flut-

tering and flounced in bobbinet, over stiffened thin pink satin ; conscious of a happy formation of *corsage*, which, while it mimicked the shape of a morning dress, concealed nothing which an evening one could have displayed; how was it possible that Celestina Marsh could, at that moment, have felt any jealous pangs from the vicinity of poor, shabby-looking little Louisa Morris? who, though she had made her mother purchase a new bonnet, had insisted upon it, that she did not want one for herself, and who certainly looked, with all her bright brown silken curls concealed by the said bonnet, which was both close and large, as little like the pretty girl she really was, as it was well possible she could do. But Louisa had been given to understand that there was to be dancing, and as it never occurred to her, that young ladies would choose to dance in fantastical head gear, representing hats and bonnets, without really being either, she had trusted to the very beautiful head-dress which nature had given her, and thought

that her ringlets, which were of equal length all round her pretty little head, falling upon her close fitting white frock, would do very well.

Nor was she, perhaps, very far wrong in her calculations ; but while the bonnet was on, she certainly did not look so smart as her neighbours, and the comfort which this afforded to Miss Marsh was very great.

In approaching the bench which Mrs. Verepoint wished to occupy, the party passed close to Ensign Wheeler, and the delighted Celestina took advantage of the opportunity to give him a playful tap on the shoulder with the stick of her parasol. " Good morning, Miss Marsh," said the young man, suddenly turning towards her. " I hope I see you well ?"

" What a sad creature, you are," returned the young lady, with an overwhelmingly brilliant flash from her great round black eyes. " I believe you have positively forgotten the way to Locklow Wood. Did not

I tell you, Mr. Wheeler, when I met you in Overby, the other day, that my brother has a private right of fishing in the beautiful stream that runs through our estate?—George ! I wish you would tell Mr. Wheeler, yourself, that you do not intend to take him up as a poacher, even if you were to see him angling in Locklow Meads.”

On being thus called upon, George Marsh hastened to place Mrs. Verepoint on the seat she had chosen, and turned to address the young ensign, with a degree of eagerness, which showed how well he remembered his poor Celestina’s statement, that *all the happiness of her life depended on him*. “ I hope, Celestina, that Mr. Wheeler knows it would give me the greatest pleasure to see him, either at my house, or in any part of the grounds, where he thought he could find amusement,” said he, holding out his hand with an air of the greatest cordiality. The young officer took his hand, bowed, coloured, thanked him, but altogether looked so shy, and so foolish, that the well-pleased brother

thought, there must certainly still be something, a good deal more than common, in his feelings for Celestina, or he never could appear so agitated.

“Fix a day, George !” whispered Celestina in his ear ; but this fixing was not easy, because the ensign had already moved off, and seemed preparing to address Miss Morris, who stood shyly behind her mother, and modestly aloof from the bench that was honoured by the occupation of Mrs. and Miss Verepoint, who, of all the “county people” were those for whom Mrs. Morris always expressed the deepest respect.

Perceiving the young ensign’s purpose, George Marsh checked the steps with which he was approaching him, determined to await a better opportunity for giving the invitation dictated by his sister. But the ardour of that young lady was ill-calculated to brook such delay, and thrusting her arm under that of her brother, she compressed it with very considerable strength, and whispered from between her closed teeth, in a

manner which very clearly displayed the agitated state of her mind. "Will you let him go away then, without it? Is it possible, George, that you can be such a dreadful brute! Would to Heaven I were dead! Or that I had a brother—or any other human creature belonging to me, who was capable of pitying the agonies I suffer, and of stretching out a friendly hand to help, and save me!"

Inexpressibly shocked at this sudden transition from rapture to despair, the greatly harassed young man, first made a hasty step forward, and then more hastily still turned round, and stepped back again, in terror, lest the feelings of his unhappy sister should betray themselves, and lead her to expose herself, and her tender passion, to the whole neighbourhood at once.

A more thoroughly independent-minded man than George Marsh did not exist, and never in his life before, had he felt so much in awe of his fellow-creatures, as he did at that moment. There was something in the

idea, that every mocking eye might be turned upon his unhappy sister, scrutinising at once her ill-concealed love, and her utter want of attraction to obtain a return, which utterly overpowered his courage, and his presence of mind.

“My dear, dearest Celestina!” he whispered in her ear as he returned to her, “for my sake, for your own, which is a thousand times more precious to me, control your emotions! Shall I take you home, my poor Celestina? Trust me, that the moment you get clear of this crowd you will be better!—you will indeed, dearest! Come with me, Celestina!” and saying these words, he tenderly took her hand, and drawing it beneath his arm, endeavoured with gentle violence to draw her away.

“Gracious heaven, George! Are you distracted?” she replied, in vain endeavouring to reduce her voice to a whisper as little audible as his had been. And then, perceiving that her sharp exclamation had attracted the attention of several persons near

her, she burst into a gay laugh, and said to two ladies with whom she was slightly acquainted, "You must not take fright at my brother's sentimental ways—he has learned all that sort of thing in Germany, I believe—and he is for ever fancying that I am looking ill, and over-fatigued, and even now, would you believe it? he has a fancy that I had better go home, for fear this unusual sort of party should prove too exciting for me!—Oh! there never was such a dear silly goose as my brother George!"

"Upon my word, Mr. Marsh," said Mrs. Knight, the lady to whom Celestina had addressed herself, "I do not wonder at your sister quizzing you a little, if you fancy she looks delicate, and out of health. I really know no lady of my acquaintance who appears to me to give less cause for such anxiety. She certainly looks the very picture of robust health. What can have put such tender doubts and fears about her into your head?"

Relieved from his alarm respecting his

sister's actual state of mind, Mr. Marsh, though a little startled by this unlooked-for attack, answered it with less embarrassment than might have been expected, declaring that, notwithstanding Celestina's rosy cheeks, she was really not so strong as she appeared, and that therefore he was obliged to take care of her.

At this moment Colonel Dermont and his lady, who had been assiduously going from group to group, bestowing precisely the proper salutation upon each, approached Mrs. Knight, and her friend Miss Thorwold, who were among the last arrivals, and welcomed them with the most courteous cordiality. The strongly expressed admiration of Alfred for the young lady giving her a degree of importance in the estimation of both, that no rank or fortune of any amount or degree could have obtained for her without it. Not that they either of them particularly admired the young lady themselves, nor had they the very slightest wish to select her for a daughter-in-law; but, in their estimation, the cir-

cumstance of their son's admiration was quite sufficient to place her actually, and bonâ fide, in a position of higher consequence than any other circumstance whatever could possibly have done.

Alfred had said that Miss Thorwold was the handsomest girl he had ever seen, and Miss Thorwold was therefore beyond all further question the beauty *par excellence* of the county of ——. This always is, and always will be, a pre-eminence that confers distinction for the time being, and accordingly both the Colonel and Mrs. Dermont addressed the young lady with the sort of observance which is everywhere accorded to a *prima donna*.

Nevertheless, while rendering their homage to this fair sovereign of the hour, their habitual amenity to all their other guests was by no means forgotten, and turning from the beauty and her friend they greeted the owner of Locklow and his sister with polite hospitality, and then, by way of saying some-

thing appropriate, and amiable, the colonel asked Mr. Marsh if he were fond of dancing.

Before the young man could reply, Mrs. Knight answered for him. "Of course he is, Colonel Dermont. Mr. Marsh is just returned from Germany, is he not? The only country in the world where people really know how to waltz. Of course you prefer this dance, do you not, Mr. Marsh, to all others?"

"I certainly do," he replied laughing, "and for a very good reason, Mrs. Knight; I do not know any other."

"I am sure it is the only one worth knowing," lisped the beauty with an inviting look.

"May I ask to have the honour of waltzing with you, Miss Thorwold?" he replied.

The young lady had already smiled her acquiescence, though she had not yet spoken it, when Colonel Dermont interfered, much in the style that a minister plenipotentiary

might have done, if some point of etiquette respecting the sovereign he represented, had been infringed.

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Marsh,” said he, “but it is the purpose of Mr. Alfred Dermont, my son, to open our champêtre ball with this young lady. You will, I am sure, have the kindness to excuse my interference, Mr. Marsh; and Miss Thorwold, I trust, will not refuse my son the honour of leading her out.”

Now, as to George Marsh, the honour of waltzing with the beauty was one which it cost him no very severe pang to resign, for though quite aware that she *was* beautiful, he did not like her. She had an air of pretension about her, which was in his opinion almost the greatest defect that a beautiful woman could have, and he therefore made his bow of resignation with very good grace, assuring the dignified master of the ceremonies that he would not for the world interfere with so in every way proper an arrangement.

But the young lady had a fancy for the German-taught waltzing of the young squire of Locklow Wood, and was fully determined to "dance a measure" with him; nevertheless she was at least equally determined to open the ball with the young squire of the Mount, and therefore, with a smile that was bland, and beautiful enough, to smooth greater difficulties, she replied, "Your son does me great honour, Colonel Dermont, an honour which of course I cannot but accept with gratitude. But in the course of the morning, Mr. Marsh, I shall hope to get a tour de waltz with you."

Celestina, meanwhile, although well-enough pleased at being seen in the same group with the most fashionable party on the ground, had by no means abandoned her project of making her brother *fix a day* for getting the *retroso* ensign to Locklow; and when, having bowed his thanks for Miss Thorwold's condescending civility, and spoken his purpose of holding himself in readiness to obey her commands, George Marsh

modestly backed out of the admiring circle which was closing round her; his sister again seized upon him, and again whispered in his ear, "For Heaven's sake, George, cross the ground with me to where he is standing!—How is it possible for him to ask me to dance if I stay here."

"My dear love! He will come to you—be quite sure, if he means to ask you to dance, he will come to you," said the unhappy George, endeavouring to evade the pursuit on which his sister was determined.

"*If* he means to ask me!" cried Celestina bitterly. "You have nothing to do, sir, but just to go on behaving in the brutal manner you are doing at present, in order to prevent him, and every other man in existence from coming near me!"

"What is it you would have me do, my poor Celestina?" cried the kind-hearted young man, who as he looked at her heightened colour, and the fierce expression of her angry eyes, thought her the most unfortunate and the most pitiable young woman in

the world. "You surely would not wish that I should ask him to dance with you?"

"Is not that a deliberate insult, sir?—is it not intended as a deliberate insult?" said Celestina, looking daggers at him.

The heart of her brother smote him. He felt that it *was* an insult; and as his pity for her always increased in exact proportion to his conviction of her want of attraction, the showy vulgarity of her appearance at this moment, together with what he felt to be the excessive plainness of her agitated features, positively brought tears into his eyes, and he said, "Forgive me, Celestina! Only tell me what you wish me to do, and I will do it instantly."

"That is all I ask!" was her reply. "If you would only have the humanity to do every thing I tell you, I am convinced that my happiness would be the result. Go now, then, my dear George; just pass your arm under his, and lead him off from that detestable girl. Ah! George! She has a mother to manage for her, and take my word for it, that it is nothing in the world but the clever-

ness of the old woman which keeps him away from me. Go, then, and bring him to me. And, fail not as you lead him over the lawn to fix a day for him to come early to fish at Locklow Wood, and make him understand that he is to dine with us, quietly, afterwards. That is all I ask of you at this moment, George. And surely there is no great difficulty in it. Go, I tell you—I will sit down here, and wait till you bring him.”

CHAPTER IX.

ICES, coffee, and cakes, having been assiduously offered to every individual assembled, the business of the meeting began; that is to say the band, after having hushed their inspiring sounds for a few minutes, burst forth again with better effect than ever; for the march was changed to a waltz, and in less than five minutes above fifteen couple were whirling round the ample circle left clear for them, on the "smooth shaven green." The scene was a very pretty one, and there was a general air of enjoyment upon almost every countenance, which tended not a little to its embellishment.

Alfred Dermont looked happier, and hand-

somer than he had ever done in his life, for his animal spirits were too much excited to leave him for a moment within reach of the malady under which he so often languished. He had no time to be wilful—no leisure to be selfish, and was therefore what his unspoiled nature would have ever made him, one of the gayest and brightest creatures in existence. His beautiful partner was all smiles, all fascination. However lofty her graver speculations might be respecting the position to which she intended her extraordinary beauty should raise her, for the present moment, at least, she was perfectly well contented by feeling convinced that she was destroying the peace of mind of Alfred for ever. For was he not in all respects the first young man in the company? He was the richest, and the handsomest; and moreover the fête was his fête, and he had therefore the greatest power of making her conspicuous by his attentions. How was it possible, therefore, that she could do better than devote herself, for the time being, to the captivating him, heart and soul, so as to

leave him little or no chance of ever knowing a moment's peace afterwards?

The reasoning was conclusive, and the conduct of the lovely Amelia most accurately regulated by it. The fête, however, was to endure for many hours, and really brilliant as it was, there might perhaps have been a possibility that her fascinating energies might, in some slight degree, have relaxed during the course of it, had it not been for a trifling accident, which acted very effectually as a stimulant.

That Julia Drummond should have been the most active and the most efficient agent in all the pretty preparations which had given to the whole scene so very much the appearance of fairy land, was the most natural thing possible; and could not have been expected to produce, in any member of the family who had watched her proceedings, any sensation partaking of the exciting feeling of surprise. Not so, however, the appearance of her own little person, when, her many labours done, and the most elaborate toilet of her life completed, she

made her appearance upon the lawn, in an extremely pretty white dress, presented to her by the colonel for the occasion, with her silken black locks carefully parted, and pushed back from her beautiful forehead, and one white camilla peeping forth from the rich knot into which her abundant tresses were twisted (very classically) behind, while another of the same delicate flowers met the point in which her perfectly well-fitted dress terminated in front, resting upon an innocent young bosom, as pure, and almost as white as itself.

Alfred, who was the only individual of the family, the master and mistress included, who ventured to appropriate the privilege of cutting whatever blossoms he chose in the conservatory, had asked Julia at breakfast if she should not like a bouquet to make her look smart. To which the little lady replied, with rather a bright flush, "Oh! yes, Alfred! I should indeed; I could make myself as fine as a queen, if I might but have two full-blown white camillas." And two full-blown white camillas, as perfect as

any that ever were seen, were accordingly laid upon her little dressing-table, with their proper accompaniment of dark-green leaves, exactly in time for her to find them there when she went to dress. Alfred was determined she should have them, because he liked to please the little creature, when the doing so interfered with no particular whims or wishes of his own; but he certainly thought that she was a little goose for her pains, and that a handsome bouquet of fine geranium blossoms would have been much more to the purpose.

He very decidedly changed his mind, however, when he saw her appear; which was not, by the bye, till the majority of the company had assembled; for then, to his infinite surprise, and, moreover, greatly to his satisfaction, he perceived that his little magpie, as he often called her, could really look pretty. He looked round for his mother, for he longed, positively longed, to say, "How very pretty little Julia looks!" But Mrs. Dermont was too much absorbed in uttering her hopes that every body she saw was well,

to give him an opportunity, and he could only mutter to himself, which he certainly did with a good deal of unction, "I'll be hanged if I ever let them make such a fright of her again. What a difference dress does make, to be sure !"

This same feeling led him to look at her repeatedly with considerable interest during the course of the day; and this was the circumstance which had served to keep alive in all its pristine vigour, the charming Miss Thorwold's determination not to relax in the display of her fascinations, till she could feel pretty certain of leaving the youth past hope of recovery on the field.

Though looking upon little Julia, her fine eyes, raven hair, cream-coloured skin, white camillas, and all, as infinitely too much below the possibility of a rivalry with her own surpassing beauty, for such a thought to rest upon her mind for a moment, she nevertheless felt it due to herself (to be sure there are throughout the world an immense amount of dues claimed upon this score), not to permit the attention of any man with

whom she condescended to flirt, even for a day, to be withdrawn from her for a single instant; and the youthful, innocent-looking little figure of Julia never approached them in the dance, or seemed likely to obtain a nod or a smile from Alfred in the promenade, without instantly exciting a fresh rush of coquetry from the beautiful Amelia. Nay once, when the probability of this seemed particularly great, her determination to prevent it rose so accurately in proportion, that she actually pressed the arm upon which she leaned, in order to render it impossible. And impossible it certainly became: Julia's bright, happy young glance met no answering glance from the bewildered Alfred in return; who, instead of looking about upon any of the objects that earth could show him, began very strongly to fancy, poor youth, that he was himself more than half way to heaven.

Meanwhile Mrs. Knight, who really, considering that she was no relation, was one of the best and most thoughtful chaperons in the world, employed a good deal of the time

that Mrs. Dermont bestowed upon her, in dilating upon the high fashion of Miss Thorwold's noble relations, and the remarkable consideration in which the young lady herself was held by all the most distinguished circles in London and Paris. To which she added, as a sort of sum total of all the items she had been rehearsing, "In short, my dear Mrs. Dermont, Amelia Thorwold is an angel."

All this important information was very carefully treasured by the person to whom it was addressed, and produced, in a greater degree than such friendly eloquence usually does, exactly the effect intended—that is to say, that before the seventh, and last of these confidential little confabulations came to an end, Mrs. Dermont became convinced, that if her admirable son should, in process of time, come to the conclusion that the beautiful Amelia was the woman he wished for as a wife, there was no reason whatever that this wish should not, like all others which had as yet arisen in his mind, be gratified. Indeed, it was impossible for her to avoid

feeling, as she watched the passionate admiration expressed by every look of her son, while at the same time she listened to Mrs. Knight's account of the young lady's merits, that his selection of her as the chosen of his heart, was only another proof of that universal superiority of intellect in him, which she had considered as so very remarkable almost from his birth.

It must not be supposed, however, that these repeated little tête-à-tête conversations with Mrs. Knight, important as they certainly were, ever caused Mrs. Dermont to forget her duties as mistress of the brilliant revels which were going on around her. Her habits, as well as her natural character, rendered such oblivion impossible. So far, indeed, was this from being the case, that there was not a single person on the ground who could have been found disposed to fancy themselves neglected; which, considering the propensity that all disagreeable people evince for this species of jeremiade, says much for the observant and amiable manners of the mistress of the Mount.

Luckily for Mrs. Dermont there were present at her fête rather a large proportion of that class of unsophisticated persons who take the liberty of enjoying themselves excessively, without giving their hosts any trouble about it. Most of the officers, and nearly all the pretty young ladies of Overby, were of this description; so that, as far as they were concerned, both the colonel and his lady felt that any interference on their part which might tend to convert what was very like the free and independent feelings enjoyed by the frequenter of a *guinguette*, into the species of responsibility and observance, which might have taken its place had they been brought into too frequent contact with their entertainers, would have been much less kind, than cruel. The English, indeed, though often declared to be a shy people, not unfrequently demonstrate a degree of free-and-easiness in this line, which appears to be peculiar to themselves; but in order fairly to judge of this, they must be seen at the fêtes to which so many of them contrive

to obtain admission in royal palaces abroad, where many of them may be observed shouting in lusty merriment over their mantling champagne, utterly unmindful of the presence, or even the close vicinity of the sovereign who is their host. That this strange-sounding statement is true, there are but too many to avouch, and thereupon may the hackneyed quotation be given, more entire than usual; for, changing the pronoun, may we not say? *they* "are mad 'tis true; 'tis pity, and pity 'tis, 'tis true."

But to return to the Mount, and the gay party assembled there. Not that they were all gay, either—nothing, indeed, could be much less gay than poor George Marsh as he walked across the crowded lawn to do his sister's bidding.

There stood the handsome young ensign whom he was to seize upon, by main force, in order to prove his *humanity* to his suffering sister—there he stood, close beside the blushing Louisa Morris, looking the picture of happiness and tender gallantry, and no

more thinking, poor young man, of the blooming Miss Celestina, than of the man in the moon.

Poor George Marsh!—he saw it all!—he understood it all! His unhappy sister had deluded herself into the lamentably false persuasion that this young man, so completely devoted to another, was in love with her! Oh! How should he break this to her?—To postpone the result of his mission till they should be alone, and thus at least to avoid exposure, was the course that first suggested itself. But a moment's reflection convinced him that this was impossible. He knew the fiery impatience of Celestina's temper too well to believe that any thing he could say would induce her to postpone the explanation she would be sure to demand upon his return to her; and so great was his dread of the scene which he anticipated upon her receiving it, that for a moment he thought he had better feign illness, and retire without again seeing her till her return home. But there was a sort of selfishness in this, which was too hostile to his nature to be indulged in

for longer than during the pang of a moment, and that being past, he determined as nearly as possible to obey the instructions of the sister he so deeply pitied.—Poor George Marsh! The species of martyrdom to which he was condemning himself had none of the sustaining self-approval which usually rewards a voluntary victim; for he was about to do what he perfectly well knew ought not to be done, though the gentle pitifulness of his nature left him no strength to refuse doing it. The melancholy contrast which his unfortunate sister appeared in his eyes to offer to all the fair young creatures around her—all basking in the sweet soft light of admiration and incipient love—struck him again with so profound an emotion of pity, that he would rather have died than suffer any additional pang to come to her through him.

“Poor, poor Celestina!” he murmured inwardly, while his eyes fixed themselves involuntarily on the delicate features of Charlotte Verepoint, “poor, poor Celestina!”

Two or three hasty steps brought him to the side of Ensign Wheeler. George Marsh

blushed like a young girl, but he mastered the weakness, and touching the young officer on the arm, he said, "Will you do me the favour, Mr. Wheeler, of walking across the lawn with me to speak to my sister? She wishes that you should fix a day for coming to Locklow Wood next week, that you may get a morning's fishing."

Ensign Wheeler, considering that he was a well-looking, gay-hearted young officer, who "dwelt in country quarters," was an exceedingly well-behaved personage; and knowing perfectly well that he was only invited to this fishing for the chance of being himself caught, he coloured a good deal as he replied, "I should be happy to accompany you to your sister, Mr. Marsh, were I not this moment going to lead Miss Morris to join the dancers. Pray make my compliments to Miss Marsh, and explain this to her."

"Certainly, sir," returned poor George, endeavouring to speak gaily; "but will you fix a day, Mr. Wheeler, for giving us the pleasure of your company at Locklow?"

Again the young officer coloured deeply; but immediately replied, "I am extremely sorry, Mr. Marsh, that it will not be possible for me to accept your invitation; but I am so constantly occupied at Overby just at present, that I really cannot leave the town for a day;" and with a somewhat stiff, yet not ungraceful bow, the young ensign stepped back, and repossessed himself of his young partner's hand.

Could George Marsh have contrived at that miserable moment to feel angry with him, it would have been a great relief. But this was impossible. He had not the shadow of a doubt but that the young man was acting with perfect propriety, and the part he was himself performing suddenly appeared to him so detestably the reverse, that all the misery of his orphan sister was for the moment forgotten, and he felt as if he had courage not only to tell her that the young ensign altogether declined her invitation, but to make her understand that it was absolutely necessary she should avoid him for the future as much as possible.

Stimulated by this very rational purpose, he lingered not in his return to the spot where he had left Celestina, who, on her part, no sooner saw him approach than she withdrew herself from the group amidst which she was standing, and beckoned him to the entrance of a shrubby walk near it. Well pleased that he should not have to recount the ill-success of his embassy before witnesses, George quickened his steps, and offering his arm to his sister, prepared to lead her onward into the sheltered walk she appeared to have chosen.

“ Good Heaven, George ! where are you going to take me ? ” she exclaimed, ere he had well made a second step in advance. “ How can you suppose I want to walk off with you in this way ? Do stand still, can’t you ? Tell me—why won’t you tell me ? — why do you torture me by this horrible suspense ? WHY did not Wheeler come with you ? Poor faint-spirited creature that you are ! I’ll bet my life that you had not courage to ask him. Where

is Frederic Wheeler, sir?—why do you refuse to answer me?”

“I will answer you, if you will give me time to speak, Celestina,” replied her brother, with something slightly approaching to displeasure in the tone of his voice. But as he spoke, the unfortunate young man raised his eyes to the flushed face of his sister, and the gaudy and elaborate preparations of her toilet, together with their lamentable failure in producing an agreeable effect, again caused him such a profound sensation of pity, that, totally forgetful of her injustice towards himself, he exclaimed, in a voice that trembled with emotion, “Think of him no more, my dearest Celestina! His feelings towards you do not merit the return which your too generous heart is ready to give;—he thinks not of you, my poor Celestina!—he has positively refused our invitation.”

“I wish with all my soul, that I had given the invitation myself,” she replied, her fierce black eyes flashing upon him, with no very

gentle expression. "I dare say you mean very well, but you are such a monstrous fool, George, that it is quite impossible to trust you. What is your reason, sir, for daring to say that he does not think of me?"

"My reason, Celestina," he replied, with desperate, but necessary courage, "is, that he is evidently devoted to another. You are right in your supposition, that he is attached to Miss Morris. I have seen enough to convince me that this is the case."

For a moment, the unfortunate inamorata felt disposed to declare that this statement was altogether false, and unfounded; but, during that very moment, it chanced that the extended circle of the waltz, now increased by many additional couples, brought the too-charming ensign, and his pretty partner (her bonnet thrown aside, and her beautiful hair floating gaily on the breeze,) close to the spot where the brother and sister stood. The effect was instantaneous. "Oh, oh!" exclaimed Celestina, in a tone which might fairly have been denominated a shriek,

and sunk, fainting, as it seemed from her attitude, upon the grass.

The terrified brother threw himself beside her, and gently raised her head from the ground. Had not Celestina previously made him aware of a constitutional peculiarity which attached to her, namely, that she never lost her colour when she fainted, his fears on her account might have been lessened by looking at her cheeks, which still retained their very remarkably ruddy tint; but having been assured by her, on some former occasion of vehement emotion, that her fainting fits, to which she was extremely subject, were only the more dangerous on that account, he gazed on this unusual union of high colour, and motionless features, with dismay.

“ Oh ! what shall I do for her ? ” he exclaimed aloud. “ Every soul seems to have left the spot, as if on purpose to distract me ! ”

No sooner had he uttered these words, than the fainting lady opened her eyes.

“Put me upon that bench, George,” she said, with a very consolatory appearance of restored animation. “I still feel dreadfully faint, and ill, of course; but if you will but run to the house, and contrive to get me a tumbler of water, and a glass of wine in it, I shall be able to get over it. Pray, don’t stand staring at me, but go and get it.”

George hastened to obey her, and the moment he was gone, Celestina very properly employed her recovered senses in arranging her dress and composing her features. In this she succeeded so well, that her appearance on this rather remote bench, only seemed to indicate a wish of being quiet, and undisturbed; a position, which could hardly fail to touch the conscious heart of Ensign Wheeler, if he should observe it, and which must, at any rate, look picturesque and interesting to every body who looked that way.

On one person, at least, who looked that way, her solitary position did produce an effect, and an effect too of very considerable importance. Mrs. Dermont having finished

one of her little tête-à-tête conferences with Mrs. Knight, on the subject of Miss Thorwold's high fashion, and other angelic qualities, walked forward, as in duty bound, upon the lawn, that she might throw a glance over the whole gay scene, in order to ascertain that every thing was going on as it ought to do. This glance showed her the solitary Celestina Marsh, without a partner, nay, without a companion, and in an attitude which really looked as if she thought the party very dull. This, though the individual was not a particular favourite, could not, of course, be permitted by so hospitable a hostess as Mrs. Dermont, and with a quickened step she immediately approached her, politely inquiring if she did not waltz.

“ Oh ! yes, ma'am,” replied Celestina, “ I am particularly fond of waltzing. Only, unfortunately for me, I have not happened to see any dancing gentlemen with whom I am acquainted.”

“ Dear me!” returned Mrs. Dermont, “ I am very sorry, Miss Marsh, that I was not aware of it before. Do you know any of the

military gentlemen? But, perhaps, you would not like to dance with a stranger?"

"I should not at all mind dancing with a stranger," replied the young lady; "but I am afraid they are not likely to ask me, unless they are introduced. Nobody can get a partner without being introduced."

"But I must take care that they are introduced," said the distressed Mrs. Dermont. "Really, Mrs. Knight is such an agreeable person, that she has made me, I fear, quite negligent of my duty. Have the kindness to excuse me for a moment."

So saying, Mrs. Dermont hastened towards a group of gentlemen, one of whom wore a red coat, and, as if determined to atone in the most effectual way for her past forgetfulness, she at once selected him as the object of her mission, saying, with all the gentle authority of an hostess, "Will you permit me, sir, to introduce you to a partner? I have a young friend yonder, whom I wish to see dancing."

Had this proposal been made by any body, save the mistress of the fête, Captain

Waters, the unlucky gentleman to whom it was addressed, would certainly have declined it ; for he was in truth holding himself in readiness to offer his hand for the next dance, to Miss Janet Murray. But, as it was, to refuse was impossible, and he therefore yielded himself, with the best grace he could, to the lady's guidance ; and, thinking that the sooner his task began, the sooner it would be ended, he had his arm round the substantial waist of the delighted Celestina, and was whirling her onward to her heart's content, in as short a time as possible.

George Marsh too, used his utmost diligence in the execution of the mission with which he was charged, and so well did he succeed, that he reached the bench on which he had left his fainting sister, about two minutes after she had left it. His first sensation, on perceiving her place vacant, was alarm. " Good Heaven ! She must have again fainted !" he exclaimed, " and has probably been carried to the house. Do you happen to know—" he was beginning, addressing himself to one or two persons

who were standing near him, when the affectionate inquiry was suddenly cut short by the apparition of Celestina herself, whirling rapidly, passed him, on the arm of Captain Waters, her eyes emitting sparks of rapture, and a triumphant smile, displaying her large teeth from ear to ear.

George Marsh stood for a moment, as if he had been turned to stone. But his recovery from this trance was any thing but painful. "Poor girl!" he mentally exclaimed, "How truly did she say, that she had reason to be thankful to Heaven for the elasticity of spirits, which enables her thus to forget one moment, what had wrung her heart the last! It is, indeed, a blessing that many may envy—and, though to me, utterly incomprehensible, I will study most assiduously never to say, or do any thing that may check it."

He paused for a moment, still holding the glass of wine and water in his hand, while she continued with the strenuous activity for which her dancing was so remarkable, to do battle with the breeze, and the grass-plot, till, both her warrior-partner and herself

having no breath left, came to a dead stop just before him.

Among various other peculiarities in her manner of waltzing, Miss Celestina Marsh had one, upon the invention of which she rather piqued herself. This consisted in retaining possession of the arm of her partner, during those intervals of rest, which the formation of the human lungs renders necessary. It was, therefore, in this attitude, and, in a manner which perhaps naturally suggested the idea of her requiring support, that she now stood before her tenderly observant brother, without, however, being at all conscious of his vicinity. Indeed, she was at that moment, too pleasantly occupied in saying lively things to the captain, to have any attention to spare for other objects.

George watched her for a moment, to assure himself that her hilarity was genuine, and not the result of any over-wrought attempt to conquer feelings, which perhaps stung her to the quick, even as she smiled. As far, however, as it was possible for a looker-on to judge, Celestina was, really and

truly, in the happiest state of mind imaginable; her features, voice, and gesture, being almost unequivocally demonstrative of delight.

It was not, however, in the young man's nature to believe it possible that she could have brought her feelings thus wonderfully under her control, without a struggle, that must perforce have shaken her severely, and it was in a voice of most gentle tenderness, that, after withdrawing her eyes for a moment from the face of her partner, by touching her on the shoulder, he said, "My dearest Celestina! I hope that you are not over-exerting yourself?"

To which she replied, in a tone of great vivacity, "Good gracious! George, what nonsense you do talk! What in the world could put it into your head that a waltz was likely to hurt me?"

Then suddenly, as it seemed, recollecting what had passed between them somewhat less than half an hour before, she looked with a comical air of intelligence in his face, and added, in a whisper uttered close to

his ear, "You need not look so dismal about it, George. It is not one man that will break my heart, I promise you. But you have brought the wine and water, I see; well, you are a good fellow for that, and it would be a monstrous pity it should be wasted."

Whereupon she seized the glass with a very cordial grasp, and having drained it to the last drop, returned it to him, saying, "Thankye, George; now get out of the way, there's a good fellow, — I'm ready, Captain Waters." And away she sprung, leaving George with the glass in his hand, and his eyes fixed upon the ground, meditating on the wondrous varieties of human nature; but blessing Heaven in his heart that, notwithstanding all the disadvantages of his unfortunate sister, it did not seem likely that he should have to endure the intense misery of seeing her sink into the grave, with her heart broken by disappointed affection.

His meditation was interrupted by the offer of a servant who was passing, to take

the glass he held; and as he raised his eyes while he gave it to him, he encountered those of Charlotte Verepoint fixed upon him. It was not the first time that day that strong emotion had sent a crimson glow to the temples of George Marsh, but it *was* the first in which the sensation had been accompanied with pleasure instead of pain. Yet did it not seem that the poor young man was as unfortunate in reality, as his sister was in his imagination? For the first eyes he had ever looked at with pleasure had soon closed upon him in death; and another pair, which had of late, by gentle degrees, almost taught him to forget that he had ever before accounted any eyes worth looking at, were found, poor youth, in the head of the only heiress for twelve miles round Overby! But as yet he had scarcely dared to confess to himself that he considered this as a misfortune; for as yet he had never dared to confess to his own heart that it was possible any imaginable combination of circumstances could bring him within reach of possessing an angel. Nothing of all this, however, oc-

curred to him at the present moment, for Charlotte Verepoint smiled when she met his eye, and George Marsh was by her side in an instant, and then for a flying hour or so, that seemed fledged all over with full-grown wings, he felt that a gathering together of neighbours on a bright day, with a smooth lawn, and a military band, might be a very pleasant thing indeed.

CHAPTER X.

A GOOD deal of very superior conversation passed between Mrs. Stephens and her husband's American friend, Mr. Holingsworth, during the course of Colonel Dermont's fête; but I regret to say, that though it contained much which *might* prove exceedingly interesting, and *must* prove excessively instructive, I cannot bestow it in detail upon my readers, because I have a great many other things to tell them, for which I shall not find time, if I go too much at length into the record of their philosophy. I will only observe that nothing less notorious than the passionate devotion of Mrs. Stephens to her husband could have saved

her on this occasion from the imputation of making a vehement attack upon the heart of Mr. Holingsworth; for her earnest and incessant speaking to him, together with the expressive gesticulations she employed, as she hung upon his arm, and discoursed on the beautiful nature of the human soul, and of the "ripening aspect" which it was beginning to wear in the United States, certainly did give her the appearance of paying him very particular attention. But Mr. Stephens was not at all jealous; on the contrary, he seemed rather to enjoy being left to himself than not, and wandered about making gallant little bows and clever little speeches to all the ladies he met, very much with the air of a man who was particularly enjoying himself.

Celestina Marsh, meanwhile, so managed matters during the five separate though not successive bouts of waltzing with which the gallant Captain Waters indulged her, that although he came to the ground half determined to make very earnest love to pretty Janet Murray, he began to doubt, before he

left it, whether, as the riotous manufacturers had returned to their work, and the detachments were soon likely to be sent off, it might not answer better, in the way of amusement, to cement the friendly intimacy to which the manners of his animated partner so frankly invited him, than to give, and perhaps to take, a heartach as a keepsake between himself and the gentle Janet. So this time, contrary to all human probabilities, the captain's much-admired little favourite went home with the tear in her eye, and her young heart as heavy as lead; while George Marsh's tenderly bepitied sister, notwithstanding the barbarous cruelty of Ensign Wheeler, made Mrs. Verepoint's carriage dance on its springs by the joyous step with which she entered it when the fête was over. To few, indeed, is the finale of any entertainment as perfectly satisfactory as was that of the Mount to her, which will be intelligible to all feeling hearts by the last few words which preceded her departure.

“Now, George, now, ask him to spend the whole day with us on Thursday, and say

about the fishing, you know, and all that," whispered Celestina to her brother as the carriage drew up.

"Ask who? Celestina!" he replied, with a look of renewed dismay, and gently disengaging his own from the too precious little hand, which, as the colonel was escorting Mrs. Verepoint, was still permitted to make him as supremely happy as it had done during more than one delicious hour of that strangely varied day. "Ask who? Mr. Wheeler is gone away with Mrs. Morris."

"What a fool you are, George," returned his sister, now, in her turn, resigning a beloved arm, in order to speak with more freedom. "How can you be such an idiot as to suppose I wanted to have any more to say to that wretch, Wheeler! Can't you see who I mean, George?" and she certainly gave what was a very intelligible side-long glance towards the captain. "Ask him, I tell you, for Thursday," and without awaiting his reply, she suddenly repossessed herself of the arm of her gay partner, and leading him forward said, "Give me leave

to introduce my brother to you, Captain Waters—Mr. Tremayne Marsh.”

After the necessary quantity of bowing and shaking hands, the distressed proprietor of Locklow Wood stammered an invitation for a day's fishing on the following Thursday, to which he received a most gracious acceptance from the greatly amused young officer; and then it was that Mrs. Verepoint and her daughter, having stood aside to make way for the entrance of their triumphant guest into their carriage, the vehicle responded, as has been related above, to the joyous bound of the enviably happy Celestina.

Colonel Dermont then placed Mrs. Verepoint, looking a little graver than usual, next her; after which George Marsh, having again, for a moment, repossessed himself of her daughter's hand, assisted her to take her place in the carriage, and then followed, and seated himself next to her. But the light which had beamed upon him during the happy hours of the day, seemed suddenly set behind a heavy evening cloud.

At the moment when Celestina had made

her last imperative demand upon him for an invitation, poor George and the fair heiress were earnestly conversing together upon subjects, perhaps hardly less sublime than some of those which had occupied Mrs. Stephens and Mr. Holingsworth; only there was this difference between them, that the two young people were both conversing solely for the pleasure of listening, each of them, to what the other should say; whereas the elder pair conversed altogether for the pleasure of admiring, each of them, all that they should say themselves. And during the time that the young pair had thus conversed together, which, to say the truth, was certainly the greatest part of the day, they of course occasionally looked at each other; and when they did so, there was nothing in the eyes of Charlotte Verepoint at all calculated to make George Marsh remember the immense distance there was between them in point of fortune; nor was there a trace left in the manner of George of that painful sort of embarrassment which sometimes, when he himself too well remembered this tremendous distance, hung about

him like a heavy mist, obscuring the glorious intelligence and beautiful refinement of his character, and giving him too much the appearance of excessive shyness, to leave him quite a fair chance of being valued at his worth. Both of them, in short, had seemed to have forgotten during that bright fête on Colonel Dermont's lawn, that there was any reason whatever why, their families having been for ages such near neighbours, and intimate acquaintance, they too, should not be the best friends in the world.

But now, all this was over. Mrs. Verepoint said a few obliging things in praise of the pretty fête, but was speedily reduced to silence by the vehement acquiescence of Celestina, whose clamorous admiration of the whole affair produced the only sounds heard during the rest of the drive. Charlotte spoke not a single word; and once, when George, addressed her by name, so distinctly as to oblige her, in some sort, to turn her face towards him, there was an expression of such profound melancholy in it, that all

courage forsook him, and he became as totally silent as herself.

Had poor George known only a little of what was passing in the heart of the heiress, it is possible that, all unselfish as he was, he might have transferred a portion of the tender pity which he felt for his sister, to himself.

Charlotte Verepoint, young as she was, and essentially gentle as by her nature she must ever be, had been brought up with too complete a knowledge of the perfect independence of her position, not to feel that she was, and ought to be, in all points of real importance to her happiness, her own mistress. That she did feel this had been already proved by her having refused no less than three very eligible proposals of marriage, to neither of which her mother, as she candidly confessed, could see any objection, and that without giving any better reason than that she liked better to remain unmarried. But as this declaration on her part was never accompanied by any protestations of intending to remain unmarried for ever,

Mrs. Verepoint appeared perfectly willing to let her have her own way, never lecturing her on the subject at all, except now and then to give her a hint that she rather feared pride of place was her besetting sin, and to counsel her to keep watch over herself in this respect, because the feeling was one which might, if suffered to become too strong, produce the very worst effects upon the character.

To these remonstrances Charlotte had been accustomed to listen, either in respectful silence, or with the gentle expression of her hope that she should not suffer any feeling to get undue influence over her. But of late Charlotte's complexion had varied a little when her mother had expressed any of these fears—for of late the meditative girl had become perfectly aware of the fact that she was beset by a danger of a totally opposite description. Charlotte Verepoint had for some time quite ceased from the vain attempt of persuading herself that what she felt for George Marsh was any thing short of love, and love of so well-founded, firm, and

devoted a nature, that there was very little hope it would ever be cured, or even weakened. She was too, little less certain of his sentiments than of her own, and had, in short, quite made up her mind to the inconvenient truth, that there was no chance of happiness for either, save in their union. That Charlotte's mother was mistaken in attributing to her a too strong propensity to pride of place, is certain, nevertheless, if only to avoid the disagreeable certainty of her doings being canvassed and censured, Charlotte wished with all her heart that she could have reversed the value of their respective estates; but as far as money was concerned, this was *all* she wished, and she certainly did not intend that the impossibility of achieving it should destroy the happiness of her life. As to the respective races from which the estates descended, that of Tremayne was in every way equal to that of Verepoint—so no difficulty lay there. Moreover, as to any opposition on the part of her admirable mother, Charlotte knew that she had nothing to fear. Once convinced that the every-way estimable

George Marsh was the object of her affection, she felt perfectly satisfied that her willing consent would be given to their marriage.

Then why was Charlotte Verepoint so sad? Why did she herself suffer, and why did she make one dearer than herself suffer, likewise, the dreadful anxiety arising from uncertainty of purpose? Strange, indeed, was it that Charlotte Verepoint, of all the people in the world, should be breaking her heart solely because she did not know her own mind! Charlotte Verepoint! the most self-possessed, the most reasonable, the most conscientious little creature of twenty years old, that ever the sun shone upon. Perfectly certain that she could never love any other man than George Marsh — perfectly certain that he loved her, as she wished to be loved by the man of her choice — perfectly certain that she could easily win her mother's consent, and that they should neither of them ever wish for greater wealth or higher station than that which was within their reach; — with all this to render her fate

one of the most happy and the most assured that ever mortal woman saw before her, Charlotte Verepoint was breaking her heart because she could not make up her mind to decide whether her love to the brother, or her antipathy to the sister, were the stronger.

This doubt, and this alone, had destroyed her peace of mind, and was in fact undermining her health, and poisoning her existence.

This statement may seem to indicate a greater power of being "a good hater," than is quite consistent with the sweet and gentle nature of Charlotte Verepoint; but no one can be quite a fair judge of the case without being thoroughly acquainted with the respective characters of both brother and sister. Poor Charlotte had not greatly blundered in her estimate of either; and though it might have been fairly anticipated that in a young and loving heart the tenderer feeling would soon have got the better in such a struggle, and have conquered its sterner but less immortal-natured opponent, the fact that it was otherwise only tended to prove the

excellence of Charlotte's nature. It was infinitely more for her mother's sake than her own that she shrunk with such shuddering dread from the idea of a union which must have brought her gracious, graceful, and most indulgent parent into perpetual contact with Celestina Marsh. And therefore it was that Charlotte Verepoint would sometimes become very painfully red, and at others very sickly pale, when her mother lectured her on the necessity of not cherishing even the virtuous and noble pride derived from an unstained descent, to a degree that might endanger the Christian humility of heart, which no one can lose sight of without sin; for she knew, in the secret recesses of her aching young heart, that nothing but the carefully cherishing every feeling which led her to revolt from coarse sentiments and vulgar manners, could save the dear unsuspecting lecturer from the closest connexion with what she felt to be an epitome of both.

* * * * *

But we must leave poor Charlotte to work her way between the two violently

opposed feelings which thus beset her, and return to the Mount and to Alfred Dermont, who, however much my wandering away from him may have left the matter in doubt, is the real hero of my tale. Nor was it from inadvertence that I ran away from him. I introduced him as a child, and it was necessary that I should give him time to grow up, without keeping the reader's eye fixed upon him during the whole process; a thousand post-octavo pages being by no means sufficient to recount the actions of both boy and man.

Perhaps the first hour in which a youth becomes conscious of being heartily in love, is as good a one as can be found for such an historian as I am to mark the transition from boy to man; and if so, the fête given at the Mount when Alfred Dermont was twenty years of age, is precisely the proper epoch at which to commence the record of his manly adventures. His young eye, indeed, had before that time paid homage due to the beauty of Amelia Thorwold; but it was only then that his admiration

assumed the character of love, and that the persuasion that unless he could obtain her as his wife, life could, under no circumstances, be worth enduring, first took possession of his mind.

There was a great deal of natural energy and fervour in the character of Alfred, which, had his education been a wholesome one, would have tended to render all his good qualities active and efficient, and given him strength and courage to combat and conquer his failings. As it was, however, the effect of this energy was very different, showing itself chiefly in resolute determination of making all persons and all things subservient to his will.

And this Amelia Thorwold, whom my hero was thus determined to win, or die, must she not at this moment be accurately described to the reader? She must, and, to the best of my power, she shall. Amelia Thorwold was at this time—start not, my very young grown-up beauties, but rather rejoice to learn that she was still in the full meridian blaze of loveliness — twenty-nine

years old; but nobody that looked at her ever thought of asking themselves, or any body else, *how* old she might be. "How beautiful!" was the thought and the exclamation that she invariably inspired; and if any particularly speculative and cold-hearted individual, male or female, did, after looking at her, find themselves sufficiently in possession of their ordinary faculties to ask, "How old is she?" the answers were probably as various as the hearers. But the most spiteful she-critic in existence, no, not even Celestina Marsh herself, would have dreamed (unless the fact were known to them) of approaching within half a dozen years of the truth.

All casual observers, or rather all who were not habitually philosophical physiognomists, believed her to be indisputably under twenty. There was an almost infantine purity of skin, and general absence of strong expression, which together, produced the delusive effect of early youth, and it was only occasionally in the *maturer* expression of the eye, that a deeply-skilled observer might

detect what was neither so very young nor so very lovely as its liquid lustre showed to the world in general.

In stature she was a little, a very little, above the common height of women; and even this little ceased to be remarkable, excepting when she stood surrounded by more ordinary mortals, because the symmetry of her form was so perfect, that it was almost impossible the eye could detect any thing out of the common way in its proportions, save that they had never looked upon any thing so faultless before. Her features were perfectly well-formed, and though delicate and harmonious, had a certain firmness of contour, which insured long life to their beauty; while the still more striking indication of both age and youth, usually afforded by the complexion, was in her so delusive, from its exquisite and enduring fairness, that it really was almost impossible to believe that it had been exposed even to the temperate sun of England, for twenty-nine years. Her eyes, of a dark hazel, were large and lustrous, their brightness being

greatly increased by the warm, yet delicate carnation of her cheek. Whether that carnation were altogether the work of nature, or of an artificer in some sort more cunning still, is a question too delicate to admit of a direct answer. If there *were* any rouge in the case, it really was administered with such consummate skill, as might almost have left the artist herself in doubt as to whether she owed any thing to it or not. Her mouth was peculiarly small, though the lips were full, and of so rich a tint, that a ruby, even without being envious, must really have looked pale if placed beside them. The teeth were small, even, and of ivory whiteness. The colour of her exquisitely formed neck and arms was almost as purely snow as that of her fair forehead itself. Yet all this exquisite beauty of colouring would have greatly lost in effect if her hair had been of any shade in the world but what it was. A red-haired sort of horse is called chesnut, and all sorts of hair, from the pale young carrot tint up to fiery red, have been honoured by the same epithet. But if, gentle

reader, you will take a real chesnut, a real bright, brown, shining Spanish chesnut, and fancy a magnificent profusion of silky hair precisely of that colour, you may obtain a correct idea of the *chevelure* of Amelia Thorwold. Such, as far as outward form is concerned, was the woman who now held the very heart and soul of young Alfred Dermont captive ; and light and lovely as the flowery chain which bound him seemed to be, he already felt its power paramount over every other claim, whether of affection or duty, which could be made upon him. In a word, he was vehemently in love—and for the first time.

When the Mount family assembled at breakfast on the morning after the fête, the colonel and Mrs. Dermont were both of them in excellent spirits. Every thing, as they repeatedly told each other, had gone off more than well—every thing had gone off brilliantly. To people with their establishment, and holding their station in life, this success, as they said, had of course nothing very surprising in it : nevertheless,

it was impossible to help being pleased at witnessing the great admiration and animated delight of the whole neighbourhood.

“Certainly, I never did see a set of people so perfectly delighted,” observed Mrs. Dermont.

“What you say is quite true, my dear,” returned the colonel; “I observed the same myself; and I must say it was all very natural, for the scene was one of very great splendour and beauty. You too, Julia,” he added, gaily tapping the cheek of his young ward, “you, too, seemed to enjoy it, I thought, not a little. I never before saw you look so well or so gay.”

“Enjoy it, sir? Good gracious! how was it possible to help enjoying it?” replied Julia, with great animation. “It is saying very little of it for a girl like me to declare that I never saw any thing one ten-thousandth part so beautiful in my whole life before—because my young little life has been so short, you know. But it is not I only, who said it: every body—yes, I do believe every body, one after another, kept on

saying the very same words. Oh ! you can't tell how many I heard exclaiming that they had never seen any thing so beautiful in all their lives."

But all this joyous and triumphant sort of feeling seemed in no degree to reach the heir of the house. He, beyond comparison the most important person who had been present at the fête, he alone seemed to take no pleasure in discussing its beauty and recalling its splendour. While his father, mother, and Julia Drummond, continued to converse concerning all that had passed, he sat at the breakfast-table profoundly silent, and seeming to feel a relief in keeping his eyes fixed upon the newspaper, instead of listening to, or joining with, them.

His having thus assumed the appearance of being occupied, kept him for some time from being annoyed by having any words directed to himself which required an answer ; but at length his mother could no longer resist her very earnest desire to hear him say something upon the subject which so pleasantly engrossed them all, and play-

fully laying her spread hand upon the newspaper, she said, "Set by the newspaper for one moment, my dearest Alfred, and tell us whether you did not think every thing went off particularly well yesterday?"

"Went off?" repeated Alfred, with a most tremendous sigh.

"Yes, dearest!" said his mother; "don't you think it was really brilliant?"

"Brilliant?" again repeated Alfred.

"Why, my dearest boy, what can you be thinking of? Have you forgotten our yesterday's fête?" demanded his puzzled parent.

"It is not very likely, ma'am, that I should forget it," replied the young man, in an accent of great solemnity.

"Don't plague him so, Mrs. Dermont," said the colonel, a little annoyed at his son's apathetic indifference to what he thought ought to interest him more than the newspaper, yet feeling it easier to blame any body and every body than him; "it is very tormenting to be talked to, my dear, when one is reading the newspaper. But I

confess that our dear boy's silence does look a little as if he had not much enjoyed the party, and if so, I promise you that it is the last of the kind that will ever be given here. Tell the truth at once, Alfred : you did not enjoy it—did you ?”

“ Not enjoy the party !” exclaimed the young man, vehemently ; “ do you think, sir, that I did not enjoy it ? Gracious Heaven, what an idea ! Never, never did I know what it was to live till yesterday ; and to pass another such day I would willingly, joyfully, consent to sacrifice the half of my existence !”

“ Nay, then, my dearest Alfred, be very sure that you shall have as many more like it as the nature of our changeable climate will permit,” returned the devoted father, eagerly. “ I don't suppose,” he continued, “ that it would do for us to send out invitations again directly, because it would look so very odd, you know, as we never happened to do such a thing before ; but trust me, Alfred, every soul that was here yesterday, down to the little drummer-boy,

shall be invited again as soon as it is at all possible we can set about it."

"Every soul!" ejaculated Alfred, with a groan.

"My darling boy, what is the matter with you?" cried his mother, in sudden alarm. "I am positively sure that you are not well—let me feel your pulse, Alfred! Do not draw away your hand, Alfred!—I am frightened to death!—I am indeed, colonel—I think he was over-fatigued yesterday, and that he is feverish—I am quite sure he is feverish!"

"I believe you mean to drive me mad, ma'am!" exclaimed the impetuous young man, suddenly rising. "Come with me, Julia; I have something to say to you."

Though pretty well accustomed to the whims and to the impetuosity of Alfred, as well as to his unceremonious calls upon her time and attention, under all circumstances, Julia was startled by this sudden summons, and a bright blush mounted to her cheek as she obeyed it—for she did obey it instantly, rising from her chair almost as suddenly as

he had done from his, and leaving the room after him without exchanging even a glance either with the colonel or his lady, by way of asking for leave to do so—for well she knew that any delay in obeying the behests of Alfred, was a fault for which no deference to them could atone ; and at that moment she would not have been inclined to yield obedience to any will which would have interfered with obedience to his.

CHAPTER XI.

IN order to render the ensuing conversation between Alfred Dermont and Julia Drummond, perfectly intelligible, it will be necessary to raise the veil by which the young girl's heart was concealed, in some degree even from herself, but most wholly and completely from every other mortal eye. The two young people of whom I am about to speak, had been reared together with a greater degree of constant association and companionship than often occurs between boys and girls, even of the same family ; for Alfred had never been at school, and very nearly all his studies,

as well as all his pastimes, had been shared with Julia.

When young people, whether of the same family or not, are thus closely brought up together, a certain degree of familiar intimacy, and, in the great majority of cases, a certain degree of familiar affection springs up between them. Where the parties are brother and sister, these kindly feelings are naturally strengthened as they increase in age, by a consciousness of duty and of fitness ; but where there is no such relation to dictate, as it were, what the lasting sentiment ought to be, a multitude of varying, nay, of contradictory sentiments, are within their reach, rendering the nature of their situations relative to each other as uncertain as possible.

In most cases, this situation will be settled by the mutual feelings of the parties, in which it is most probable that there will be a good deal of sympathy; but in the case before us it was otherwise. Excepting that in the heart of each there was what may be termed a broad foundation of good-will to-

wards the other, there was about as little sympathy as possible. Julia's affection for Alfred so completely predominated over every other earthly attachment in her heart, that every day, every hour, every moment, was tinctured by it ; whereas, the affection of Alfred for Julia produced little or no effect upon his existence sufficiently strong for him to be himself conscious of its influence.

Had she been suddenly snatched away by death, or by any other accident, he would probably have been a good deal surprised to find how much he missed her ; but as this did not happen, and as it did not enter his head that any such event possibly might happen, his mind never rested for a moment in meditation either on her or it.

He had heard, as long as he could remember to have heard any thing, first, that he was the very loveliest child ; next, that he was the most magnificent boy ; and last, that he was the most superbly handsome man, that nature had ever contrived to form. He might be more properly said to

know all this, than to believe it, because belief of course implies the possibility of doubt, and in this case no such possibility existed.

In like manner he had as constantly heard from the same early period of his existence, that Julia Drummond was a very plain little thing ; and on this point too he might rather be said to know, than to believe—at any rate he would have told you so himself—that Julia Drummond *was* a very plain little thing. Meanwhile, Julia, on her side, had heard the same unvarnished statements as constantly as he had done, and her conviction of their truth amounted in her case, as in his, to the degree of certainty which is usually denominated knowledge.

Julia knew perfectly well that she was a plain little thing, and she knew also that her companion was the most finished model of beauty that human eyes ever looked upon. It would be folly to attempt tracing the effects which these respective convictions produced on the minds, tempers, manners, and affections, of the two young people ; for any such examination would, of a surety,

incur the double danger of really attributing too little, and seeming to attribute too much to it. But among a variety of other consequences produced by their ever-present agency was, as might be expected, a total absence of personal vanity on one side, and a most remarkable abundance of it on the other.

But though the absence of this peculiar weakness produced all the good effects on Julia which every rational observer of human character will be likely to anticipate, its abounding presence in poor Alfred had, from another peculiarity of his nature, a less blighting effect than might have been expected.

With all his faults, and they were as numerous as might be expected from his education, with all his faults Alfred Dermont had a warmly affectionate heart; and although this quality, like every other, was coloured, and sometimes almost distorted, by the medium of variety through which he looked at every thing, it nevertheless, from the innate excellence of its own precious

nature, would often seem to reflect back something of brightness even on the vapidness of vanity itself—for there was certainly something touching in the absolute faith he put in every expression of admiration, liking, good-will, or attachment that was expressed towards him. These kindly feelings he, of course, believed to be universal, and not unfrequently had he said to Julia, when speculating upon their various friends and acquaintance, “I really wish, Julia, that I could like and love every body as much as they like and love me. But this *is* impossible, is it not? And it cannot be considered as my fault, I hope, can it?”

“No! dear Alfred,” she would say in return, shaking her little black head, and sighing, she did not well know why. “No! there can be no fault in not doing what it is really not in your power to do.”

And this assurance satisfied him, and he went on from year to year, with the most unsuspecting conviction that all the fine things said to propitiate the favour of his father and mother, were neither more nor

less than spontaneous and irrepressible expressions of the immense affection of the speakers towards himself—affection which, as he and Julia agreed, he could not reasonably be expected to return, but which he was ever ready to reward by the most undoubting belief in its sincerity.

The result of all this was, that long before little Julia knew she had a heart, that heart was filled with love for Alfred—love made up of every feeling that woman's nature in its sweetest, tenderest perfection can concentrate upon one only, and wholly beloved object; and that Alfred looked upon her as only one of the multitude who, from the inferiority of their nature to his own, were, as it seemed, constrained to look up to him with unbounded admiration and love, and at the same time incapable of inspiring an adequate return from him.

Of all these involuntary adorers he might, perhaps, be conscious that Julia was the favourite; but if asked to explain this, he would probably have accounted for it from the circumstance of her having been so constantly in attendance upon him. He

had, indeed, often said to his mother, that he had been so long used to Julia, that "strange to say," he thought the not having her to wait upon him would be one great reason for his not choosing to go to college.

It was not till the hour in which Alfred first beheld the startling beauty of Amelia Thorwold, that he conceived the possibility of admiring another, as much as every body else admired him. As long as he remained in her presence at this first interview, his whole being might almost literally be said to centre in his eyes, and most assuredly it was the first time that he had ever found out how exquisite a pleasure the sense of sight could convey.

But this first interview was not immediately followed by others; the young lady had left the house of Mrs. Knight to pay a visit of a few weeks to a family in a neighbouring county, and Alfred, secretly feeling a strong degree of indignation at her choosing to place herself, after once seeing him, where there was no chance of seeing him again, remained with an extremely vivid re-

membrane of her personal charms stamped upon his fancy, but with a sort of latent feeling of displeasure also, which sufficed, during this interval, to prevent any idea of falling in love with her from entering his head.

In fact, he scarcely thought her worthy of it, strongly suspecting that a too intense consciousness of her own charms had rendered her incapable of appreciating the perfections of others.

There was something in this exceedingly repugnant to his feelings, and he persuaded himself that he remembered Miss Thorwold with no more emotion than if she had been a picture or a statue.

The moment, however, that he saw her step forth in her goddess-like beauty upon the lawn at the Mount, he began to feel that he had under-rated her power. His heart beat, his limbs trembled, his voice faltered ; but by degrees, this new-born timidity gave place to the equally new-born rapture of throwing his arm around her in the waltz, of feeling her eyes fixed in gentle languish-

ment upon his, and of hearing her whisper a thousand pretty nothings in his ear ; the principal charm of which consisted in their being inaudible to every one else.

All this, at twenty years old, will go far towards making almost any young man fancy himself in love ; but to a youth like Alfred Dermont, who had been nursed in a perfect hot-bed for bringing every germ of will, and whim, to prompt maturity, it was sufficient to put his soul in a tumult of passion, which led, in the course of a few hours, to the fixed and very resolute determination of making the young lady his wife. On this resolution he had both waked and slept, and the consequence was, that he arose in the morning with the intention of immediately communicating it, all ripe and ready for execution as it was, to his honoured parents.

As to any possibility of their opposing his intention of marrying Miss Thorwold, and of marrying her immediately, it never entered his head ; his tranquillity, therefore, was in no degree disturbed on that score ; but although his parents had thus satisfac-

torily succeeded in teaching him that he never need fear any opposition to his will from them, they had not been able so completely to conquer the natural feelings of youth in all things as to prevent a sensation of timid bashfulness (quite as new to him as even the passion of love) from mixing itself with his purpose of disclosing his wishes and intentions—and it was this bashfulness which made him now desire the attendance of Julia, in the manner related at the conclusion of the last chapter.

CHAPTER XII.

It was to his own pretty quiet little study, made equally elegant and comfortable by the tasteful and industrious agency of Julia, that Alfred now led the way, Julia following, fear of she knew not what, causing her heart to beat almost audibly.

“Shut the door, Julia,” said Alfred.

The door was shut, and Julia stood, trying very much not to tremble, immediately within it. “Pray sit down, Julia,” said Alfred, “how foolish it is of you to keep standing!—How do you suppose I can talk to you in that way?” Julia was seated in a moment, but it was on a chair so nearly behind that on which Alfred had placed

himself, that he could scarcely see her. "Why, Julia!" repeated Alfred, in a voice that proved that he was not less agitated than herself, "I want to speak to you as a friend, and you run away and hide yourself, as if you were a naughty little girl, afraid of being scolded;—but I am not going to scold you, Julia." Alfred spoke with gentleness, and almost in a whisper—yet still it was easy to perceive that he was greatly agitated.

He was indeed, agitated, and very naturally too, considering the, to him, extremely novel subject upon which he was about to speak. But why was Julia agitated? She, who had been used, for more years than she could remember, to listen to all Alfred's secrets, and to hear with unwearying sympathy every thing he chose to say to her, because he did not choose to say it to any body else—why did Julia tremble now, when she had never trembled before?

I am almost ashamed to tell—young ladies, that is quite grown-up young ladies, of eighteen, nineteen, twenty, and so on, will

all think her so very silly. But they must be kind enough to remember that Julia was but sixteen and a half, and it may, perhaps, be as well to mention two or three little circumstances which had occurred the day before, and which may perhaps, in some slight degree excuse her.

It the first place, it was only the day before, that poor Julia, for the first time in her life, began to doubt whether it was quite certain that she should continue all her life as ugly as she had been while a child. She had felt, at the very least, as much surprise as pleasure, when she overheard one of the military guests say to another, "Who is that devilish pretty little girl with the white camilla in her black hair?" Had there been any body else wearing a white camilla in black hair, Julia would never for a moment have imagined that they were speaking of her; but there was not, and moreover, the gentleman addressed replied to the questioner, "I have just been asking the same question, and was told that she was a ward

of the colonel's, and that her name's Drummond." So there could be no mistake. But that was not all, if it had been, the effect of the pleasing novelty would have been infinitely less profound. No ! it was not all, nor nearly all which had occurred yesterday to give birth to hopes which only the day before would have appeared to her mind, had they crossed it, as wilder than any fable that ever was invented. She had heard Alfred say, Alfred himself, who scarcely ever allowed that any one was well-looking, she had heard Alfred say to his mother, in the early part of the day, before he had begun to dance with Miss Thorwold, "How very pretty Julia Drummond looks ! You must never let her hide her beautiful eyes and forehead again."

Is there any body so unfortunately old as to have forgotten what it is to have been sixteen and a half ? If not, every body will hear with indulgence that those words produced an effect upon Julia as completely disproportioned to their value and their

meaning, as the spark which set fire to the Houses of Parliament was to the conflagration which followed.

Poor little girl ! She did not look quite as ridiculous as Malvolio, when engaged in contemplating the cross-gartering which he fancied would be so irresistible to his mistress, but she was scarcely less deluded, when, standing before her glass on the morning after the fête, she carefully combed away the satin-like dark locks which had heretofore so heavily shaded the ivory forehead beneath them, and fancied that when they met at breakfast, Alfred might again look at that forehead, and those eyes, and again think that they were "beautiful."

Moreover, it ought to be remembered, in mitigation of her folly, that she now herself made the discovery, and really for the first time, that her eyes *were* very particularly large, dark, brilliant, and beautiful; and as those magnificent eyes looked back at her, as she gazed at them, she mentally exclaimed, "Oh, what a lucky thing it will be for me if Alfred really does care about eyes ! How

often I have read about eyes doing mischief and wounding hearts, and thought it such stuff!—But there may be some meaning, and some truth too, in it. Oh ! if it were indeed, and indeed possible that Alfred could love me !”

Such meditations have been, still are, and ever will be, quite sufficient, at sixteen and a half, to set the fancy galloping through all the possible and impossible chances which lead to happy love, leaving the stricken one in a fool’s paradise, where, for some short space, a few hours, perhaps, neither doubt nor fear can enter.

So was it with little Julia ; and when she placed herself in the chair that was almost behind Alfred, she did so to avoid the too vehement emotion which she knew she should feel, when he should say that he loved her with lover’s love, and wanted her to love him in the same manner in return.

These were the thoughts which made Julia tremble when Alfred said that he was not going to scold her ; and when he stretched out his hand in order to draw her

towards him, she really felt, poor child, as if she must certainly faint, fall, and perhaps die, if the scene continued much longer.

Happily, however, for poor Julia's delicacy, Alfred was in no condition either to understand, or indeed in the slightest degree to perceive what was going on in her young bosom. It was nothing new to him, poor fellow, to be thinking too much of himself, and his own feelings, to leave him any power of discovering those of other people; and now, seized upon for the first time by one of the most powerful passions to which human nature is exposed, and embarrassed, not so much even by timidity, as by the unwonted vehemence of his own sensations, it was not very wonderful that he was as utterly unconscious of her being agitated at all, as if she had been the ill-placed chair itself, instead of its occupant.

But not even the fear of fainting, falling, and dying, could overcome the habitual compliance of Julia with every intimation of her loved companion's will; and almost before he

had finished speaking, she had changed her place, and was seated close beside him.

“Oh! Julia! Julia!” began the young man, “we have read together of the power of love, but without either of us, I believe, ever forming any rational idea of what it meant,—but with me, dearest Julia! this calm, this ignorance, this peaceable indifference, is over for ever and for ever!” And Alfred wrung her little hand with all the vehemence of strong emotion as he spoke.

But, happily, again, it was only one of his hands that was thus engaged; the other was pressed, with equal energy of muscle, against his forehead, his eyes being so covered by it as to render him incapable of seeing the tears which were beginning, from excess of agitation, to bedew the burning cheeks of his young companion.

And then he quitted her hand, and resting both his arms on a table which stood before him, buried his face upon them. Oh, how she longed to tell him that he had nothing to fear! Alfred, however, with all

his faults and follies was no driveller; he had, naturally, considerable strength of character and decision of purpose, and after yielding for a very short space to the weakness which had led him to conceal his features, he rose up, and standing before Julia, with his hands clasped together, he exclaimed, "Julia! I am ten thousand fathom deep in love!"

If the thought of Julia at that moment had been articulated, it would have sounded thus, "It is come then!" But ere another, with its glancing wing could follow it—ere she could even feel that she was thankful for it, he added, as unconscious of the woful work he was about as the plant which distils its poison on the hand that approaches it—"Ten million thousand fathom deep in love with the angelic, the arch-angelic Amelia Thorwold!"

How shall I find any metaphor, any illustration, which shall convey some idea of the tremendous revulsion of feeling which these words produced in the heart of Julia? The most apt which occurs to me is comparing it

to the effect produced by suddenly throwing a very large bucket of cold water upon red hot iron ; and I employ it, because it holds good in more ways than one ; for not only did the words of Alfred convert what was glowingly bright, to a state the most completely the reverse, but it rendered strong and firm, that which, the instant before, had been soft, and almost melting.

Yes, this really was as nearly as possible the effect which Alfred's avowal of love for Miss Thorwold produced on the heart of Julia Drummond. Her tears disappeared, she would herself have been greatly at a loss to tell how. Her complexion had quite lost its glow, which is a phenomenon more easily explained ; but what was not so easy, and yet was most undeniably true also, the whole condition of her moral being was changed likewise. She was a child no longer, neither in look, in thought, in word, nor in deed.

Hitherto, she had been the most yielding, and easily led little creature that ever lived, but she was so no more. They say that the

last moments of consciousness in a wretch that is drowning, suffice to recall distinctly to his passing soul every event that has occurred to him in the state of existence which he is about to quit, and somewhat in like manner did Julia Drummond, at one rapid glance, review the whole course of weakness and presumption of which she had been guilty.

That she, who knew far better than any one else in the world, the superiority of Alfred to all other human beings, that she, with absolutely no pretensions, should have presumed to think, for a single instant, that he could dream of mating himself with her, had a degree of preposterous presumption in it, for which a whole life of the strictest self-abrogation could be scarcely sufficient to atone.

“But if not enough, it is all I can offer,” thought Julia, her heart swelling with intensity of resolution, “and if I firmly adhere to my purpose, I may still be worthy to live, and live his friend;—if not, if I should have any return of the degrading

madness which seized upon me to-day, I will pray to Heaven that I may be permitted to lie down and die."

It took much less time to make this resolution, than it will do to peruse this record of it; and no sooner was it made, than Julia looked up steadfastly in the face of her friend, and took her first lesson in endurance from the half-mocking, half-playful glance, with which he looked down upon her now pallid features.

"Why, Julia!" he exclaimed, "you are absolutely good for nothing, child, by way of a confidante and comforter. I made you come here with me, because I thought I should like better for you to tell my father and mother that I intend to propose to Miss Thorwold immediately, than have the—the sort of awkwardness of doing it myself; but you look as if you were frightened out of your wits, and instead of your telling them of it, as I wanted you to do, in an easy sort of manner, like any other message from me, I am sure, that if you go to them, looking as marble-like as you do now, they will take

fright at once, and fancy that I am going to do the most out-of-the-way thing in the world, instead of the most ordinary and natural. How can you be so very silly, Julia?"

Julia attempted to smile in reply to this lively sally, but the attempt was injudicious, for it certainly did make her look very strange, and unlike herself.

"What in the world is the matter with you, Julia?" said Alfred, looking at her with surprise. "Surely you have not taken into your silly little head that my angelic Amelia is not a proper match for me? As to her fortune, I know nothing about it, and you may tell my father and mother if you will, that I don't care a single straw whether she has a hundred thousand pounds, or not a sixpence. As to family, we all know that she is very highly connected. And in personal merit, Julia, where, oh! where shall I ever find any human being equal to her? Tell me, Julia, and be sure that you say exactly what you think, did you ever see any thing so heavenly beautiful as Amelia Thorwold?"

“Oh! yes, Alfred—she is very beautiful indeed!” replied Julia, eagerly. “Tell me, only tell me,” she added, “exactly what it is you wish me to say to my guardian and Mrs. Dermont, and depend upon it I *will* say it without forgetting a word.”

“How can you be such a fool, Julia!” cried the young man, stamping his foot upon the floor, impatiently. “If I wanted them to get the information in my own words, could not I speak them myself? The fact is, Julia, that I am too much agitated to know exactly what to say. You now know the state of the case, my dear, and I want you to tell them that I have made you my confidante, and opened my heart to you—and then you may add, that it is quite clear to you that no power on earth will ever induce me to marry any one else—and that you think she is an angel, and that you wish them joy of their great happiness in having such a daughter—don’t you understand, Julia? If all this passes between you and them, you know, all the worst part of the business will be over before I come upon

the scene—and, then, dear souls, they will only have to kiss me, and wish me joy—and all the rest will be plain sailing, I flatter myself. For I am quite sure, Julia, that the angel was aware of the impression she had made upon me, and oh! that heavenly smile which she gave me when we parted! Would it not be treason to doubt her tenderness, after feeling it fall like a bright sunbeam on my heart? Go, then, my darling girl, go at once. For pity sake make the communication as quickly as you can, and come back again here when you think the proper time is come for me to make my appearance.”

“I will not delay for an instant,” said Julia, and in another moment the door of the room was closed between them.

Julia stood still before the entrance to the breakfast-room to recover breath, and to assure herself that she was physically capable of performing the task before her. Of her own courage, firmness, and power of concealing the feelings which it had become the first duty of her life to conquer, she had no misgivings. But she had once in her life—about a year before, fainted, in consequence

of sudden terror, on hearing Alfred's gun go off the instant after he had left the breakfast-room, and before it was possible, as she thought, that he could have discharged it purposely. Might not the same sort of thing happen to her again at the moment she had to disclose the news of which she was the messenger?

It was no proof of mental weakness therefore, but on the contrary, showed perfect self-possession, when she turned away from the door which she had raised her hand to open, and quietly, very quietly, walked to the dining-room, which was at the farther extremity of the hall, knowing that water and glasses ever stood ready for use on the side-board. Julia was frightened when she perceived how violently her hand trembled, as she poured out the water, but her most painful sensation at that moment arose from feeling that she was ashamed of herself. The most pungent salts would have been less effectual as a restorative than the stern severity of scorn at her own position, which made her knit her brows angrily for a moment, and then caused her to breathe a

prayer to Heaven, either for speedy death, or power to conquer emotions which must make her unworthy to live.

She then took the refreshing draught she came to seek, and was in the act of returning the glass to its place, when Alfred entered the room.

He started at seeing her, either from surprise at finding her there at all, or from again, and more deliberately remarking the extraordinary paleness of her lips and cheeks.

“Why are you here, Julia, when you promised that you would not delay a moment in giving my message?” he exclaimed. “And what in the world is the matter with you? You look like a ghost, child. And you have come here to drink water too, as well as myself? That I should be a little in need of the cooling beverage, is natural enough, but upon my word, Julia, it is very absurd if you have taken it into your head that you are going to do something terrible in announcing my attachment to my father and mother. It looks very much as if you thought they

would find fault with my choice. By Heaven if they do——”

“No, no, Alfred! Fear nothing of the kind!” returned Julia, her heart leaping once more for joy—for it was happiness, positive happiness to perceive how utterly free from all suspicion of the truth he was. Free from all power of believing that such wild folly was possible.

“I only came here for water,” she said, “because you called me out of the breakfast-room before I had taken my tea!” The eyes of Alfred were fixed upon her as she spoke, and the consciousness that she had had recourse (probably for the first time in her life,) to a subterfuge, brought so bright and beautiful a flush to her cheeks, that the effect of it, together with the more than common expression, which strong emotion had awakened in her rich dark eyes, made her even to his pre-occupied fancy, look so exceedingly lovely, that he continued to look at her for some time after she had ceased to speak, and the doing so seemed to soothe his spirits, or his temper, for the look of

angry defiance with which he had just spoken, disappeared entirely, and it was with one of his own peculiarly beautiful smiles, that he said, "Well, well, Julia—I am not going to scold you. You do not look as if you wanted any more cold water now, so run away, there's a good girl, and do what you promised. You know that I can never bear any thing, that in the very slightest degree approaches to suspense."

Julia smiled at him in return, and was out of the room almost before he had ceased speaking.

What would have become of the comfort she carried with her, arising from the conviction that her weakness was not, and never could be suspected, had she known that the first thought which arranged itself in the mind of Alfred, after her departure, must, if spoken sincerely, have run thus:—"If that little girl were not still so perfectly a child in heart and mind, I should positively think that she had been fancying she was in love with me herself. But, thank Heaven, that is perfectly impossible. I know that in all

such things, she is as mere a baby as she was a dozen years ago. But when she does grow into a woman, she will be a lovely one."

Yet if Julia was really as reasonable as she appeared to be, this passing thought which had flitted over the mind of Alfred, ought not to have given her any lasting uneasiness, for it was stifled, as soon as born, by the multitude of other and dearer thoughts which had taken possession of him—and the restless impatience with which he paced up and down the room, and then changed his place to the hall, in order to be within reach of the first sound which would announce that the conference was ended, proved clearly enough how his mind was occupied, and that no image, save that of the resplendent Amelia Thorwold, was at all likely to recur to him.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN Julia entered the breakfast-room, she found the colonel and his lady, naturally enough, in a state of vehement curiosity to know why their son and heir had left their presence so abruptly, and why Julia Drummond had been ordered to follow him.

They had sat perfectly still, not having even taken the liberty of ringing, to have the breakfast things taken away; for so admirable was the manner in which this son had been reared, that his authority over them could be exercised by the very slightest look, or movement; and as they had both thought, when he left the breakfast-table in the abrupt manner which has been de-

scribed, that it was his purpose to come back to it, they would have sat there much longer still, without disturbing the position of his tea-cup, rather than have run the risk of his being disappointed if he *did* come back expecting to find it.

Nor would they, had he now reappeared, have ventured to exhibit their curiosity as to the cause of his absence, in any way that might have looked like expecting that he should give an account of himself; but questioning Julia was quite another thing, and this they proceeded to do, both at once, and as they did not happen to ask exactly the same questions, the task of answering them with impartial civility, would have been difficult, had not the overwhelming importance of the intelligence she had to communicate, borne down all form and ceremony, and enabled her, without infringing the sort of respectful etiquette to which they were both rather partial, to stop both their questionings, by saying, "I have got something very particular, very unexpected, to tell you. And you must please both of you to listen

to me very kindly—as, indeed, you always do.” And here Julia stopped for a moment, in order to find out in what words she could best convey the intelligence that Alfred was in love.

The colonel endeavoured to look composed; but in his heart he was firmly persuaded that Alfred, in one of his scamperings, had done some particularly unlucky piece of mischief, and that Julia was sent to announce it. Either one of his best horses had been killed, or half a hundred panes of hot-house glass broke; but the excellent old gentleman knew that, let it be what it would, he could not really be very angry, if it was Alfred who had done it. If, indeed, it should prove to have been Julia, which he did not think very likely,—but if it did happen to turn out that she had contrived to break one of the great mirrors in the drawing-room, or any thing else, possible or impossible, of the same atrocious kind, he felt that he should be exceedingly angry indeed: for girls never ought to have the same privilege of being naughty as boys.

Nay, he even remembered with satisfaction that, by the whimsical will of her grandmother, which has been already mentioned, she would come into the uncontrolled possession of her little fortune (by his generous care augmented to the respectable sum of ten thousand seven hundred pounds), on the day she was seventeen, of which she now only wanted a few months; and that if she really had broken the great mirror, it would be doing no more than right to make her pay for it. His hitting upon such an expedient to set the imagined mischief right again, was a pretty strong proof that the length of time during which he had been left to twirl his thumbs over the breakfast-table, had put him into as bad a humour as his temperament would permit.

Neither was the imagination of Mrs. Dermont idle during this pause, but it carried her in a very different and much more feminine direction. Her eyes were naturally fixed on the face of Julia, both when she spoke, and when she ceased to speak; and it instantly struck her, that the newly

developed beauty of that beaming face, which she only too well remembered that Alfred had pointed out to her yesterday, had so turned her adored son's head as to have induced him to make the mad proposal of marrying her, and that she was now come, at the request of Alfred, to announce the fact, and to propitiate their consent to the match.

The indignation to which this conjecture gave rise in the mind of Mrs. Dermont, was very great indeed ; and considering that Julia was of a very good family, had ten thousand pounds, and was, moreover, to her certain knowledge, one of the very best little girls in the world, it was rather greater than was quite reasonable. This, however, was only one proof amidst ten thousand, of the sort of comparative estimation in which she held her son, and her husband's ward. The colour mounted to her cheeks, and her eyes assumed an expression as little accordant with Julia's request, that she " would listen kindly," as they well could.

“Listen kindly!” she ejaculated. “That must depend a good deal, Miss Drummond, on the sort of thing you have got to say.”

Had Julia been quite as composed as she endeavoured to appear, the strangeness of this unwonted appellation would doubtless have struck her, but as it was, she took no notice of it—most likely, indeed, she did not hear it, for she resumed her speech, thus:

“I told Alfred that I was sure you would, both of you, be as kind as possible,—but I think you will be very much surprised; Alfred wants you to know at once, but without his telling you himself of it at first, that he is very much in love.”

The colonel burst into a joyous laugh, and rubbed his hands together with infinite glee, exclaiming, “God bless his dear heart! Is he indeed? So much the better, Julia, so much the better! A young man in his station of life, and with such prospects, nay, with such certainties before him, ought not to enter his twenty-first year without having some such idea as that come into his head. I am glad to hear it, my dear, I am, upon my soul, and so

you may tell him; and the sooner he comes to talk to me about it himself, the better I shall be pleased."

"Upon my word, colonel, I think that must depend a good deal upon who it is that he fancies himself in love with," said Mrs. Dermont, "Alfred, manly as he is in looks, in mind, and manner, is but a youth, after all, and it is likely enough, I should say, that he may not quite know his own mind, and may have taken it into his young head to like some one to-day, whom he would be very much ashamed of marrying to-morrow."

These words brought such an accession of colour to the cheeks of poor Julia, that Mrs. Dermont, whose eyes were fixed upon her, no longer felt the least doubt but that she was the heroine of her own tale, and naturally enough disgusted by the want of delicacy which such a proceeding displayed, as well as provoked at the want of conscious superiority which such a choice displayed on the part of Alfred, she rose impatiently from her chair, and pushing Julia, who

stood before her, not very civilly aside, walked towards the door.

“Stay, stay, Mrs. Dermont,” cried Julia, springing towards her, and seizing her hand, “you have not heard more than half my message yet!—I have not told you who the lady is! Pray, pray, do not go till I have told you that!”

Mrs. Dermont stopped short in her hurried progress towards the door, for a sudden conviction came over her that she had blundered,—that her unequalled Alfred had not been guilty of the prodigious folly of which she had mentally accused him; and finally, that she had used poor dear little Julia very ill. “True, my dear, true;” said the repentant lady, coaxingly putting her arm round Julia’s waist, “and it is very wrong to accuse my poor Alfred of folly before I know what he has done to deserve it; but speak out at once, Julia, will you? You cannot wonder at my being rather impatient. Who is the lady?”

“Miss Thorwold,” replied Julia, very distinctly.

"Miss Thorwold!" exclaimed the colonel.

"Miss Thorwold?" cried the wife ; and though he spoke in admiration, and she spoke interrogatively, there was nothing in either accent which sounded at all like displeasure.

"The boy shows a good taste, at any rate," said the father. "Nobody can deny that. She is the loveliest creature I ever saw."

"He has made choice not only of the handsomest, but of the most highly connected and distinguished young lady that he could have found, if he had searched the whole county through," added the mother.

"As far as I am concerned, my dear," said the colonel, with dignity, "I shall make no sort of objection. Young men in the position of Alfred ought to marry early. He is heir to a property that justifies in him, what is generally considered as imprudent in others. Tell him to come to us, my dear girl;" he added, tenderly, "and tell him, also, that he has nothing to fear. I would go to him, dear fellow ! only, I think it might have the air of breaking in upon his privacy. Tell

him *that*, too, Julia, make him understand my feelings thoroughly."

"And tell him also," said Mrs. Dermont, with equal tenderness, "that he shall find his adoring mother, as he has ever found her, devoted to his happiness, and only wishing to live as long as she can contribute to it!"

Such words as these of course could not be uttered without tears; and the composure with which Julia appeared to listen, formed a strong contrast to the emotion with which the parent spoke.

The only pain, however, which these tenderly approving messages caused to Julia, arose from the delay which the delivery of them must occasion to the gratification of the only wish of which she was now conscious—namely, that of being alone—but she delivered them faithfully, and without retrenching a syllable.

"Thank Heaven, that's over!" exclaimed Alfred, whom she found striding with prodigiously long steps up and down the hall. "And thank you, too, dearest Julia," he

added, pausing in his approach to the breakfast-room, "you have been very kind to me !"

They parted ; Alfred to receive the tenderest assurances from his parents of their entire approbation of his choice, and Julia to the longed-for solitude of her own apartment, where her first act was to kneel, and thank Heaven for the strength which had enabled her to preserve her terrible secret ; and when she rose again, she felt stronger still, and the first bitter agony of young hope's disappointment over, and the fearful danger of disgraceful discovery past, she became perfectly resigned, tranquil, and self-possessed.

She almost smiled now at the wild folly which could have made her dream, even for an instant, that such a being as Alfred could select *her* for his wife ; and then told herself with the philosophy of patient resignation, that different sorts of people had different sorts of happiness assigned them, and probably those only were hopelessly unhappy who stubbornly resisted the ar-

rangements of Providence, by setting their wishes upon some impossible fancy, the gratification of which was doubtless made impossible, because, if obtained, it would not prove productive of real happiness to the wisher.

Nor were these mere passing, ineffective thoughts, suggested as a sort of refuge against positive despair; they were, on the contrary, the settled conviction of the young girl's mind, and Julia left her room, after a couple of hours seclusion in it, without feeling any danger of having her youth blasted by unhappy love; on the contrary, she looked forward to an immensity of happiness from watching the happiness of Alfred: her first object through life should be to make herself useful to him, to his beautiful wife, and to their dear children. Oh, how she should love those children!

But the first step towards all this happiness was to be made by her cultivating the acquaintance, and winning the friendship of the beautiful Amelia; and she felt so certain she should succeed in this, by dint of

her own constant efforts to please her, that she had no misgivings on the subject, and only felt anxiety about the manner of getting near her, and being enough in her society to prove her devotion and attachment.

This, indeed, did seem rather difficult ; for Julia had never, as yet, been included in any of the invitations from the neighbouring families ; had never even been taken to call at the house of Mrs. Knight ; nor had any one ever thought of doing her the honour of introducing her to the beauty *par excellence* of the yesterday's fête.

" But this cannot last," thought she ; " the families must be brought into great intimacy by this event ; and if nobody else will introduce me, I will introduce myself."

Few people would easily believe, and fewer still, perhaps, would understand the degree of tranquillity to which these thoughts, these hopes, and these intentions, restored the mind of Julia ; for few people have been as effectually taught to put themselves, and to feel themselves, so much in

the back-ground as Julia. What had happened to her appeared so perfectly natural, excepting indeed the short-lived folly of her hope, that it would have been absurd, beyond excuse or pardon, to sit down and mourn over it as if some terrible misfortune had fallen upon her.

Nothing had fallen upon her that she could dare to call a misfortune—for could the happiness of Alfred be classed as such? No! nothing bad had happened to her—she was exactly in the same situation as she had ever been; and her cogitation ended by her thinking that it was a great blessing public breakfastings did not come every day, bringing silly officers to talk nonsense, and making every body look so gay and happy, that the wearing a pretty flower was enough to make the very plainest people look for a moment as if they were pretty themselves. It certainly was a great blessing that such things did not happen often.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE interview between Alfred and his parents may be easily enough imagined. They were all kindness, and he was all gratitude. They shed a few tender tears, which he repaid by a good many happy smiles, and all this occupied about half an hour; and then the colonel thought it was time to come to business; wherefore, laying his hand gently upon the arm of his lady, who was in the act of throwing it for the third time round the neck of her son, to aid her expression of delight at his coming happiness, he said, "Come, come, my dear, this is all very natural and very proper, but it

won't go an inch towards winning the fair lady. Alfred, like the perfectly well-conducted young man he has ever shown himself, did not think it right to propose to the object of his affections yesterday, because he was kind enough to wish for our opinions on his choice; but now, that all that part of the business has been settled so very pleasantly, we must begin to think what our next step ought to be. Tell me, my dear boy—and be very sure that your will shall be law—tell me, shall you prefer writing your proposal to the young lady herself; or making it to her by word of mouth? Or would it be any relief to the natural shyness which I believe every young man feels in such a situation,—would it be any relief, Alfred, if I were to write to the young lady's uncle, the Lord Ripley, making the proposal in form, with the offer of proper settlements, and so forth? Or shall your mother, my dear boy, desire our old acquaintance, Mrs. Knight, to break the subject to Miss Thorwald?"

"Neither the one nor the other, sir," re-

plied Alfred, colouring violently, "I am greatly obliged both to my mother and you for the kind manner in which you have received this avowal of the state of my affections, and I do not scruple to tell you both, that I should have lost my reason or my life—perhaps both—had I met with any opposition. I feel that I must possess Amelia Thorwold, or die. You will not, therefore, suspect me of any uncertainty or vacillation of purpose when I tell you that I do not consider the interest which I flatter myself I have obtained in her heart, to be sufficient to justify an immediate proposal. You must ask her to visit us, my dear mother—you must let me enjoy again the heavenly pleasure of her society, and suffer me to take my own time and opportunity for asking her the question upon which my existence depends."

"Assuredly, my dearest Alfred!" exclaimed his father.

"Can you doubt my readiness to invite her, dearest?" exclaimed his mother.

"Thank you both!—thank you!" cried

the impetuous young man. "But when shall it be, ma'am? I feel as if the least delay would be the death of me."

"No, no, no, Alfred!" cried both of the terrified parents at once, "there shall be no delay."

"No, not a single hour!" added his mother. "I will write to Mrs. Knight instantly, and ask her to come and dine here any day that you yourself will fix, my dearest Alfred."

"Ask her to dine here, ma'am? Good Heaven! is that all that you mean to do? Do you suppose that I can propose to her as I take off her shawl when she arrives?—or when I put it on at her departure?"

And here Alfred struck his forehead with a considerable degree of violence.

"No, no, Alfred! Your mother does not mean any such nonsense, I am sure. When they come to dinner, they must of course stay the three days that our staying company generally do. Of course, my dear boy, your mother intended nothing else," said the conciliating colonel.

“ But indeed, indeed, sir, she must intend something else, or all your purposed kindness will be of no avail. I cannot be driven post, sir, in such a business as this. You really must give me time—and whether I confess my feelings to her at the end of three days, or thirty, I should wish that Miss Thorwold should be invited to stay here for a month.”

“ Most certainly she shall, Alfred,” replied his mother eagerly, “ and for exactly as many months as you like, my dear.”

She paused for a minute or two, and then added, fixing her eyes upon the colonel's face, and looking a little embarrassed, “ only I hardly know either, how we can find an excuse just at first, for asking her for so long a time. It will seem rather odd and familiar to her, my dear, will it not? considering that she never was at our house at all before yesterday.”

“ Oh! mother! mother! is that the way to talk to a man so distractedly in love as I am?” returned Alfred, clasping his hands, and looking the very picture of misery—

“odd?—familiar?—Oh! what words are these when my life is at stake!”

“Alas! my dear, dear boy! what can I say?” replied poor Mrs. Dermont, looking inexpressibly distressed. “There is nothing in the whole wide world which I would not do to make you happy; and if I am frightened at the idea of doing any thing strange, and out of the common way, it is only because I dread the idea of her thinking us less acquainted with the manners of people of fashion, than we ought to be. You should remember, my dear, how very highly connected Miss Thorwold is, and that for this reason, if for no other, we ought to be careful that every thing we do, and every step we take, is in proper style. What do you think about it, colonel?”

“Why, I protest, my dear, that I do not at this moment see my way very clearly. We must think about it a little—and, perhaps, our dear Alfred himself may suggest something.”

“Yes, sir,” said Alfred, rather pettishly, “I will suggest something. I will suggest,

if you please, that you should send for Julia Drummond. She knows, as you are aware, of the state of my affections, and she is such a quick-witted little creature, that I have no doubt she will invent some scheme or other that will make the matter easy. Stay—I will go and look for her myself.”

Alfred had no difficulty in finding her, for, the meditation we have recorded being over, she had just left her room, and with her bonnet on her head, and a parasol in her hand, she was going out to enjoy a solitary walk in the shrubberies.

“Do not go out just yet, Julia,” said Alfred, taking the parasol out of her hand in his usual unceremonious manner, “we want you very much in the breakfast-room. My father and mother are all kindness, but they are puzzling their poor dear heads most lamentably about matters that I dare say you will find it easy enough to make smooth, if you will but set about it. And don’t be afraid to *dictate*, as you call it sometimes, because it is exactly what the dear souls are longing for.”

By the time he had reached this point in his harangue they had reached the breakfast-room door, which he instantly opened with his accustomed impetuosity, and presented Julia to the council, without having given her any intimation whatever of the subject upon which she was to be consulted.

“Dear fellow !” exclaimed Mrs. Dermont, “he has brought poor little Julia to us, in order to help us out of our difficulties ! and the poor dear girl looks quite bewildered—naturally enough, to be sure.”

The good lady, however, appeared by no means disposed to take offence at her having been thus summoned ; but said, in her very pleasantest tone, “Come here, Julia, and sit down by me, and let us hear what sort of invention your young head can hit upon. Of course you have told her, Alfred, where the difficulty lies ?”

“No, indeed, mother, I have left that to you, for I don’t understand the difficulty, and I should not much wonder if Julia did not, either,” said Alfred.

“Oh dear me !” cried Mrs. Dermont, still in the most perfect good humour; “when young men fall in love, they can see nothing—at least they can see but one thing; absent or present, the beloved one is for ever before their eyes, to the exclusion of every thing else. But this is the difficulty, Julia. Alfred is very anxious to have Miss Thorwold invited to stay here for a good long visit—a month, perhaps, or something of that sort—which is quite a matter of course on his part, certainly, which we can all of us very easily understand. Now the question is, how are we to find any reason for inviting her, which we may assign both to herself and Mrs. Knight, without alluding to the real one? For dear Alfred will not have a word said about that at present—he chooses to take the breaking it to her entirely upon himself, and to select his own time for it. What can we invent now, to say to her, Julia?”

Julia listened to every word of this with the most earnest attention, but without the least trace of agitation or discomposure of

any kind. For the space of about two minutes after Mrs Dermont had ceased speaking she remained silent, and then said, with a smile that was perfectly easy, natural, and *genuine*, "I think, Mrs. Dermont, that there is a way in which you might do it without any awkwardness at all, if it will not be giving you too much trouble."

"Trouble, child ! how can you possibly suppose that I should care for trouble at such a moment as this ? Go on, let us hear what you have got to say, whether there is any sense in it, or not."

"Well, then," returned Julia, smiling again, and looking almost as pretty as she had done the day before ; "my scheme would be this:—If I were Mrs. Dermont I should drive over, to-morrow, perhaps, to Mrs. Knight, and I should say to her, but particularly, of course, to Miss Thorwold also, that the young people all seemed to enjoy the little fête of yesterday,—you must say *little*, I suppose, Mrs. Dermont, though it is not quite true, to be sure,—that they all seemed to enjoy it so much, particularly

the breakfasting, or dining, whichever you choose to call it, in the tent, that the colonel had determined to request the officers to let their marquees remain on the ground while the fine weather lasted; and that you intended to have a few of your young neighbours to pass a little time at the Mount, that they might amuse themselves with bows and arrows, or dancing, or any thing they liked, and that if Miss Thorwold would be one of the party, it would give you great pleasure."

"Capital!" exclaimed Alfred, clapping his hands, and looking at Julia very much as if he longed to give her a kiss for her cleverness.

"Well done, Julia!" exclaimed Mrs. Dermont, laughing. "Has she not hit upon a good scheme, colonel, to get a little more of the same pleasure she seemed to enjoy so greatly yesterday?"

Poor Julia—"her poppy, her mandragora"—et cetera. But no such quotation, no such thought occurred to her. She gave one glance, however, at Alfred, involuntarily,

perhaps, but it was natural that she should wish to see if he so interpreted her proposal.

He certainly did not, but, on the contrary, drew near her, seized her hand, and said, with great unction, "I am *very* much obliged to you, Julia. My mother is only jesting. Neither she, nor any body else could really believe for a moment, that you were thinking of yourself. You never do think of yourself."

"As far as I may presume to judge in such matters," said the colonel, "I must say, that I think the plan of Julia admirable. It not only obviates all objections, but it does more—a great deal more. By having a few more young people in the house, the walking about, and the separating into parties, and all that sort of thing, is made infinitely easier—and neither the young lady herself, nor any of her noble friends and relations, can suspect that she is invited here, only for the purpose of giving Alfred an opportunity of seeing more of her before he makes up his mind. There certainly would be something very awkward in that—and,

as I think, I may venture to say, the invitations from the Mount, are not in general managed awkwardly, I should be very sorry that it should happen so now."

"There is not the least danger of it, sir, thanks to Julia," returned Alfred. "But there is one point upon which I must beg leave to correct you. Pray do not suppose, any of you, that I want any further opportunities of studying Miss Thorwold's character, in order to enable me to make up my mind. My mind is already made up, finally, and for ever! Nothing can ever shake my opinion of her excellence, nothing can ever lessen the passionate love I feel for her! Let this be understood at once—I do not wish to have her invited hither, for the purpose of deciding whether I ought to marry her, but in order to tell her that I must marry her, or die! But I must beg, that I may never hear any observations from any one, respecting her, that shall seem to indicate a doubt of her being the only woman, who ever can make me happy. And now, that I have, once for all, fully explained myself on this

point, let me hear, mother, quite seriously, what you think of Julia's plan? Do you not think that it will remove all difficulties?"

"Yes, indeed, my dearest Alfred, I do," returned Mrs. Dermont, very cordially, "and I really did mean to joke, and nothing more, when I said that she had proposed it for her own sake. She has not been all her life so completely one of the family, dear Alfred, without feeling, as we all do, that nobody's pleasure ought to be brought into competition with yours. And now, being all agreed upon the principal point—I mean, about filling the house with company, and having the tents kept up, and all that, let us consult a little about whom it will be best to ask. And to prove to you, that I do not really think Julia selfish, I shall be very ready to hear her opinion on that point too. I could not help thinking, yesterday, that she was getting to look quite like a grown-up girl, and therefore, you know, we must treat her as one. Come, tell me, Julia, whom shall we ask? Don't let us have any of the town young ladies, if we can help it; they all

seemed to me to be so dreadfully free and easy, yesterday. And to say the truth, considering Miss Thorwold's high connections, I don't think it would do in that point of view. But I declare, I hardly know who we can get, by way of making a very pleasant party. A very small party, I suppose, would not answer the purpose?"

"No, ma'am, it would not, in any way. I would not give a farthing for the whole thing, hardly, if I did not think we should be able to waltz every evening. Julia, you know, can play—she plays waltzes beautifully—and there is something in Amelia's waltzing. But I must not trust myself to think of it."

"Waltzing?—dear me, I declare I never thought of that," said Mrs. Dermont, looking rather flurried. "I am very much afraid, Alfred, that if you make a point of having waltzing every evening, we must ask the town young ladies, for I don't see how we are to get it up without them."

"Oh! yes, Mrs. Dermont, you can," said

Julia, "if Alfred thinks that two or three couple will be enough?"

"Enough? Perfectly enough, ma'am. Let me but have—I mean, that if I have the happiness of dancing with Miss Thorwold, I shall care very little how many couples are dancing after me."

"Then would not Miss Verepoint and Miss Marsh, be young ladies enough for the purpose?" said Julia.

"Perfectly ma'am, perfectly, as far as I am concerned," said Alfred, addressing his mother. "And, besides," he added, "George Marsh is one of the very few young men whom we should like to have staying in the house, and he is a great waltzer. Just fresh from Germany, you know, and as to his sister, we all know that she will go on spinning from night to morning, if you will let her."

"But who shall we have to dance with her, Alfred?" demanded Mrs. Dermont, rather anxiously. "I do not think I should like to have her here for long, if we could not manage to get a partner for her."

"Then you must ask the Stephens's, mo-

ther," said Alfred. "You saw what a waltzer he was, yesterday. Very nearly as good, I thought, as Marsh himself, and fifty times better than any of the officers. Besides, we could not have them staying in the house, you know."

"Certainly, my dear, we could not have a parcel of strange officers staying in the house," observed the colonel, briskly. "We are obliged to do those sort of things in India, but it would not do at the Mount, by any means. I don't see any objection to the Stephens's, if you don't."

"I have no objection in the world, as far as I am concerned," returned Mrs. Dermont; "I am only afraid that they might be rather surprised at such very great civility themselves. Don't you think it will seem odd to them?"

"I heard Mrs. Stephens say yesterday, that they were going to paint their dining-room," observed Julia, "and that she dreaded the smell of the paint. Might you not ask them on that account, without saying any thing about the waltzing?"

“ You are my guardian angel, Julia,” exclaimed Alfred eagerly. “ There, ma’am, now I am sure every possible objection is answered. There can be no reason for asking old Mrs. Verepoint, because Charlotte has been staying here by herself, you know, before now, and that will make one room less; and that room may then be offered to dear Mrs. Knight. I delight in Mrs. Knight! I never saw any creature so devoted to another as she is to Miss Thorwold. It is quite beautiful to see it. Besides, I know she can play waltzes—and then dear Julia can take a dance now and then if she likes it. At any time, if my divine Amelia gets tired, I would take a turn with you myself, Julia—that is, provided I do not happen to have any thing very particular to say to her while she is sitting down.”

“ Oh! I am never tired of playing, you know. It will be a great pleasure to me. I shall not wish for any thing else,” said Julia, earnestly.

“ The first thing then, will be to drive to Crosby—to invite THE lady and her friend.

And I do not see why it should not be done to-day, instead of to-morrow," said the colonel, "and if they agree to come, you can call at the Grange as you drive home—that will be setting about the business zealously, will it not, Alfred?"

"Thank you, a thousand thousand times, my dearest father!" exclaimed the young man, his handsome face brightening into an expression of extreme delight; "you are all three the very dearest and best people that ever were born. But it is no good for me to attempt telling any of you how grateful I feel, for unless you were as much in love as I am, it is impossible you could understand me. As to you, Julia," he added, turning gaily towards her; "I hope some day or other you will be in love yourself, and when the time comes, you shall see if I am not grateful! I will move heaven and earth, my dear, to arrange things for you, as nicely as you have now done for me."

CHAPTER XV.

FORTUNATELY, no difficulties of any kind arose to impede the execution of the plan thus fixed upon. Mrs. Knight looked at Miss Thorwold, and Miss Thorwold looked at Mrs. Knight, when the invitation was given ; but this was very natural, and when they both, as with one accord, bowed and smiled, and said that they were sure it would make them very happy, Mrs. Dermont waited for nothing more, but greatly delighted at having thus happily achieved the principal part of her commission, took rather a hurried leave, saying that she had one or two more calls to make, and determined, if possible, not to return home till she had

arranged the whole party in the manner proposed.

Fate appeared to favour the whole arrangement in a very remarkable manner, for every body Mrs. Dermont called upon was at home, and all the persons invited agreed to obey her summons, with every appearance of being highly gratified by it. Charlotte Verepoint coloured a good deal when the individuals intended to compose the party were enumerated, and for about half a moment she fancied that she should make up her mind to decline joining it ; for the person, dress, voice, and manner of Celestina Marsh, as she had seen her the day before, were very disagreeably fresh upon her memory. But before she felt quite ready to speak herself, her mother had spoken for her, saying, in her gentle manner, that she knew no reason whatever why Charlotte should not enjoy the pleasure so kindly offered, at least for a few days. And after this it was quite impossible for Charlotte to invent any objection. So onward went the happy Mrs. Dermont, with as little loss of

time as possible. Beech Hill was her next stage, and here, too, she found the owners at home ; but in the first instance she was a little dismayed by the sight of their long-backed American friend, Mr. Holingsworth, whom, to say truth, the whole of the Mount family had completely forgotten. No sooner, however, had his strikingly transatlantic person met her eye, than she remembered all about him, and all the fine things which Mr. and Mrs. Stephens had whispered about his prodigious intellectual superiorities, on the day when they called to introduce him.

“ It won’t do,” thought Mrs. Dermont; “ I must go away without saying any thing about it.” But at the very moment that she was meditating how best to account for so oddly-timed a visit, without disclosing the real object of it, a servant entered, and in a subdued, but by no means inaudible voice, demanded of the free-born citizen whether he chose to have his baggage taken to the inn, where the London coach was to stop for him, before he went himself, or whether he would prefer being troubled

with it in the carriage that was to convey him thither to-morrow morning.

The answer proved that his plan of departure was very decidedly fixed ; whereupon Mrs. Dermont skilfully led the conversation to the subject of paint, and its injurious effects on the constitution, adding, in the most amiable and condescending manner, that if Mr. and Mrs. Stephens would favour them with their company for a few days at the Mount, it would give them all great pleasure, and would enable the obnoxious decorators to go on with their operations without any ill effects being produced by it.

Mrs. Stephens coloured with pleasure at this flattering proof of attention from so decidedly the first family in the neighbourhood, and replied, even without the ceremony of first consulting her "*Liebe*," that in her situation it might certainly be of important advantage for her to escape for a day or two, and that she would accept the gratifying invitation with the greatest pleasure.

Mrs. Dermont, nevertheless, remembering the real object of her visit, failed not to turn her eyes upon the waltzing divine; or, as his prejudice-emancipated wife not unfrequently called him, the divine waltzer, and said that they should of course hope to see him likewise.

This appeal enabled Mr. Stephens, greatly, it must be confessed, to his satisfaction, to break off a discussion upon the effect of genu-wine freedom upon the higher class of intellectuals; a phrase which Mr. Hollingsworth took care to render intelligible by passing his hand caressingly over the top of his own head. Starting from the chair in which his high-minded friend had kept him imprisoned by throwing his legs across him, and resting his heels upon a table, and advancing with a rapid step towards Mrs. Dermont, Mr. Stephens assured her that her obliging invitation was, on every account, precisely the most agreeable one he could have received.

“Well now, I am out of luck, I expect, this time,” said Mr. Hollingsworth, turning

himself round in his chair, with his legs still extended to their utmost length, as if he had been secured to his seat by means of a pivot; "I suppose they wouldn't give me back my money at the coach-office, would they, if I calculated upon stopping a day or two longer in these parts?"

Mrs. Dermont, was, as we know, rather in a hurry, which she now mentioned, very politely, as an excuse for leaving them abruptly, and moving with rather a more rapid step than usual towards her carriage, set off to Locklow Wood, which, though, rendering her drive altogether rather a long one for her stately coach-horses, she was exceedingly anxious to visit before she returned, that she might be able to surprise her Alfred with the agreeable intelligence that she had already accomplished all that he wished.

As she approached the house, "now all too large for its shrunk" domain, she descried the owner in a very rustic garb, and spade in hand, assiduously removing the weeds from the gravel road which led to it. He took off his hat as she passed him, and hastened

forward to hand her from her carriage, not perhaps without some little feeling of surprise, that the lady of the Mount should, on that day, be making visits instead of receiving them. She soon, however, explained the object of her visit, which he seemed to welcome, as every one else had done, with great satisfaction.

“Is your sister at home, Mr. Marsh?” said she. The answer was in the affirmative.

“Then perhaps, you would have the kindness to inform her of the purpose of my visit, and bring me her answer, without my leaving the carriage, for it is so late, that I shall hardly have time to get home before the dressing bell rings.”

“She will, I am sure, come to the carriage to speak to you in a moment,” replied Mr. Marsh, as he hastened into the house.

For some time Mrs. Dermont was so pleasantly occupied by recalling the success of all her invitations, and anticipating the pleasure which her Alfred would feel at hearing how charmingly the scheme pros-

pered, that she sat waiting, without feeling any sensation of impatience; but this could not last for ever, and her attention being recalled from her meditations by the restless pawing of her horses, she remembered that she had been sitting there an immense time, and that it was quite impossible she could stay there all day; whereupon she called to the footman, who was amusing himself by watching the gardening skill of a tolerably large party of fowls, who were hunting for what they could find among the flower beds, and desired him to ring the house bell and inquire whether she could have the pleasure of seeing Miss Marsh.

The man obeyed; a maid servant who answered the bell, disappeared with the greatest promptitude as soon as she had received the message, and returned again almost immediately with the assurance that Miss Marsh was making the greatest of haste, and would be there in no time.

Again Mrs. Dermont had recourse to her thoughts; and this time she employed herself not unprofitably, for she began running

over in her mind all she should have to say to her housekeeper on her return; nay, she took time to argue with herself the doubtful question, whether it would be better for her to drive half-a-mile out of her way in her road home, in order to tell the butcher to come up immediately to receive orders for the unexpected demands about to be made upon his stock in trade.

Yet still Miss Marsh appeared not; and again the patience of Mrs. Dermont began to fail, and again she repeated to her footman exactly the same order he had received before, with the additional clause, that if the young lady was still engaged, Mrs. Dermont would beg her to have the kindness to send her answer, as she was unfortunately obliged to return home immediately.

The maid received this second embassy with distended eyes and open mouth, as if only too conscious of its solemn importance, and again she vanished; but not again did she return, for it was the very striking figure of Celestina herself which now appeared, approaching with hurried steps across the wide

old hall, and bending low her head as she approached the open door to save the limp ringlets she had been so carefully arranging, from the too rough visiting of the summer breeze. Having reached the carriage door, however, she was obliged to look up, and, but for the *high spirit* upon which she piqued herself, she might have felt a little disconcerted by the peculiarly grave air with which Mrs. Dermont apologised for having been obliged to hurry her; and then repeated, with very considerable stateliness, the invitation which she said she presumed had been already delivered to her by her brother.

Mrs. Dermont, though rather fine, and a little proud, was by no means an ill-tempered woman, but there was something in the elaborate sweetness of Celestina's appearance, which painfully reminded her of the time she had been kept waiting, and pleasant as was the purport of her speech, the manner of it was not very gracious.

But what cared Celestina for that? Not the thousandth part of a straw. Visions of

dressing, flirting, waltzing, talking, and boasting of it all afterwards, raised her vivacity to a pitch infinitely too high to be reached by the cold demeanour of Mrs. Dermont's manner. Her usually high colour, was considerably higher still ; her black eyes looked all the brighter and all the fiercer for it, and the inconceivably broad grin with which she accepted the blessing offered, caused Mrs. Dermont a momentary pang of regret at Mr. George Tremayne Marsh's having ever been sent to Germany, or having ever returned so accomplished a waltzer.

But there was no help for it now. Miss Celestina, her red cheeks, her fierce eyes, her lank ringlets, her enormous white teeth, and all her trumpery finery, must be one of the peculiarly honoured, and alas ! too intimately-thrown-together little set in the sight of whom her peerless Alfred was to perform the delicate part of a lover !

Poor Mrs. Dermont had heard—though totally guiltless of ever having taken part in an amusement so peculiarly unsuitable to

persons of high distinction—but she had heard that there was such a thing as quizzing; and if this terribly lively-looking young lady took a fancy to amuse herself in this manner during the process of the intended courtship, she felt that it would be too much for her, and that she should probably be driven to very strong measures, such as taking to her bed, or something of that kind, in order to escape from the suffering of witnessing it.

For the first half mile after leaving Locklow, this excellent lady was in a state of such really low spirits, that any one who had looked at her, must have supposed that she was carrying home tidings of utter failure, instead of perfect success; but then, most fortunately, the remembrance of the important demands upon her hospitable cares which so large a party of “staying company” rendered unavoidable, roused her to a sense of duty, and ere she reached the butcher’s shop, her spirits were relieved, at least for the time, from every anxiety save such as was connected very pleasantly with the monopoly of sweetbreads, sirloins, fillets of

veal, and fore-quarters of lamb. This was a real blessing, and the obsequious butcher having promised not only to do all that mortal man could to assist in fulfilling her liberal designs, but also that he would make many neighbouring mortal men assist him, whenever his own resources should fail; Mrs. Dermont drove up to her own door, a little late, it is true, and a good deal fatigued, but happy beyond measure in the delightful consciousness of having done her duty, and of bringing home to the darling of her heart the news he would best like to hear. She felt, and with reason, that she should be proud to meet both him and her housekeeper. She felt that they must both of them approve and admire her. Nor was she disappointed by the reception she received from either.

“ Well, mother?” were the expressive words of Alfred, as he met her in the hall, and seized upon her hand, as if that could answer him more briefly than her lips—
“ well, mother ?”

“ Well, Alfred !” she replied, with a smile

which carried as perfect conviction to his beating heart, as any oath could have done, that the idol of his affections had promised to become a guest in the house of his father.

"Then she will come, mother!" he rejoined, looking earnestly in her face for an instant, and then kissing her.

"Yes, dearest! she will come—and so will all the others, Alfred, who were selected to make up the party."

"All, my dearest mother? How can you have contrived to see them all?"

"There is nothing like an earnest good will, my darling son, to enable one to get through business quickly. I have not only seen all the guests that were to be invited, but another person also, hardly less necessary to our scheme, than the party themselves. I have seen the butcher, Alfred, and taken such measures as will, I hope, insure the garrison from all risk of starvation."

"You are the very best and dearest mother that ever son had!" exclaimed Alfred,

with one of those bursts of affection which he sometimes displayed, and which might have excused, perhaps, if any thing could, the intimate persuasion which existed in the breasts of both his parents, that nothing could spoil him.

“And the day, mother?” said he, with an animation that certainly made him look very handsome.

“The next but one after to-morrow,” she replied. “I could not have them before, my dear, because there are so many rooms to be got ready. Six rooms, Alfred, besides the ladies’ maids. We shall be quite full, and, indeed, I shall have no room for that Miss Celestina, but one of those we call bachelors’ rooms. I hope the Tremayne blood will not be affronted.”

“The bachelors’ rooms are excellent rooms, mother, fit for any lady in the land,” replied her happy son. “But where is *she* to sleep, mother? Oh! how I wish I could sing, that I might give her a serenade under her windows! Tell me, where is she to sleep?”

“ In the pink room, Alfred. It is the gayest looking, and I think it is very likely Miss Thorwold will prefer it to the damask room, though that is the handsomest to be sure. But I shall put her friend Mrs. Knight in the damask room, and then they will be close together, you know, only a dressing-room between. You think she would like the pink room best, don't you, Alfred?”

“ Oh! yes, mother, It is exactly the one I should have chosen,” cried Alfred. “ *Couleur de rose* !—angel !—yes, it is exactly the proper room for her.”

This conversation, which, considering that the dinner was waiting, was rather a long one, took place as Mrs. Dermont mounted the stairs to her dressing-room, Alfred following her from step to step; but it would probably have lasted longer still, for the happy young man had seized upon the handle of the lock, and kept the door open, in spite of his mother's gentle efforts to shut it, had he not espied Julia at the end of the passage. He then closed his mother's door

for her, and was by the side of his confidential friend in a moment.

“She is coming, Julia,” he exclaimed, “she is coming! Every thing has been done exactly according to your plan. They are all to come. My mother has seen them all. They are all to come the next day but one after to-morrow. Is the pianoforte in good tune, Julia? I hope, my dearest Julia, that you will enjoy it!”

“I am very glad,” answered Julia, retreating suddenly to the room she had just quitted, and where, it may be, she had left a glove, or a handkerchief—“and I *am* very glad!” she repeated to herself, when she got there. “This will be the time for me to get acquainted with Miss Thorwold, and to make her love me. I will be so very kind, so very attentive, so very much devoted to her! But perhaps it will not signify. If I were she, I don’t suppose I should either see or hear any thing but Alfred.”

CHAPTER XVI.

NEVER had any lady more cause to rejoice in a well-ordered household, than had Mrs. Dermont on the present occasion. Considerably before the hour at which the first of the expected guests arrived, not only was the whole mansion, so lately thrown into confusion by the great fête, in the most perfect order, but the very flower-beds looked as if they were dressed for company; not a trace was left upon the well-swept, well-watered, and well-rolled lawn, of the gambols which had been played upon its delicate herbage a few short days before; and, excepting that the tents were still left standing, there was nothing to recall the gay confusion which

had so completely metamorphosed the soft tranquillity of its ordinary aspect. The whole company arrived, with great propriety, so as exactly to give themselves time to dress for dinner, and no more, and therefore, when they assembled in the drawing-room, exactly at seven o'clock, the meeting so closely resembled that of an ordinary dinner-party, that the colonel, thinking it necessary to do or say something to prove that it was no such thing, and that it was intended that they should feel themselves at ease, and without ceremony of any kind, walked to a window, and, having stood there for half a minute, turned round, and, addressing the whole circle in an audible voice, said: "What a beautiful afternoon it is. We must not sit long at table to-day, as if we were a formal dinner-party, but the fair ladies must all wrap themselves in their shawls, and let us enjoy a stroll in the grounds before tea."

His son looked at him for an instant, with a glance that spoke a volume of gratitude and love, and then, addressing the

beautiful Amelia, behind whose chair he was hovering, he said: "My father's proposal is not a bad one, Miss Thorwold. Is it not a misery, in the dog-days, to be kept imprisoned in a dining-room?"

"Oh! horrible!" she replied, throwing up at him one of those glances which very few young men of twenty can stand with perfect steadiness. Alfred ventured to put his hand upon the back of her chair; he ventured also to bend over her, but his heart beat so violently, that for the moment he lost all power of speaking.

She sat, meanwhile, so beautifully still beneath his gaze, that one might have thought, sweet creature, she was turned to stone. But not having, by many degrees, so nearly lost her reason as the young man had done, she felt that the audience was too numerous to justify the continuance of such dumb eloquence any longer, and turning half round, with another glance, powerful enough to have felled a giant, she said: "Don't you delight in the country, Mr. Dermont?"

Alfred, whose two only visits to London had been short and far between, hesitated for an instant, and then replied: "Upon my honour, Miss Thorwold, I can easily believe it possible, that in some situations a man may lose all consciousness of the nature of the place in which he stands—he may take trees for palaces, or a crowded street for a sylvan solitude; a human voice may sound to him sweeter far than the flute of a professor; and he may mistake—oh, how easily! a woman for an angel!"

Of course this was said in a very low whisper; but Miss Thorwold heard it all, and murmured, in return: "What an enthusiast you are!"

This phrase is, as it ought to be, a great favourite with very beautiful young ladies, for it is applicable to a prodigious variety of circumstances and situations; but Alfred had never had it said to him before, and it produced an effect upon him which it is not easy to describe. It was as if she had said to him: "Alfred, I understand you!" Yes, she did understand him, yet she did not

frown. Was he awake? Had he really so spoken already, that she could read his heart? And having read it, did she indeed permit him still to stand close behind her—still to be within reach of the ravishing music of her angelic voice, still within reach of the heaven-fraught flashing of her speaking eye? Oh, why was he not alone with her at that blessed moment? Why could he not prostrate himself at her feet, proclaim his devoted love, and ask her to share with him the prospect of succeeding, in due course of time, to the Mount, and its three thousand five hundred per annum? It was really dreadful to be so very near, both in form and in spirit, and yet to feel that it was absolutely necessary to forbear from expressing the overwhelming rush of tenderness which swelled his heart!

Under these circumstances, it was really a relief when the door was opened and dinner announced.

It must not be supposed, that during these little passages of sentiment between Alfred Dermont and Miss Thorwold, the rest of the

company sat silently looking on, in the disagreeable attitude of observant spectators. On the contrary they were all, more or less, occupied about their own affairs. Mrs. Knight and Mrs. Dermont occupied a sofa together; and the former lady again entertained the latter by a variety of interesting and affectionate observations on the personal merits, and distinguished connections of Miss Thorwold.

If Mrs. Dermont had listened with interest to this theme, on the day of the fête, solely because her son had appeared to regard the young lady with admiration, it will be easily believed that now, considering her, as she did, as neither more nor less, than his future wife, and her own successor in the important situation of mistress of the Mount, every word uttered by Mrs. Knight was received with the most earnest attention, and treasured with observant care.

At the lower part of the ample room, and placed in the recess of a window, stood the colonel and Mr. Stephens; the colonel being occupied, to the very utmost extent of

his meditative faculties, in the inward contemplation of the one great subject, which pervaded every bosom of the true and real domestic circle of the Mount, as the atmospheric air pervades the region in which we live, permitting objects to move about, and have existence within it, but never being really displaced for a moment.

Nothing could be better than the colonel's gentlemanlike air of listening to every thing which his philosophic neighbour uttered ; but had it been examined curiously, it would have turned out to be only the triumph of manner and habit, for he really had not the slightest idea of what Mr. Stephens was talking about. That gentleman, being, in fact, engaged in an endeavour to place in a striking point of view, the advantages likely to arise from bringing people together in the manner in which the present party were now assembled ; observing, that in a country neighbourhood, there certainly was no other way of mutually eliciting talent, bringing forth individuality of character, and in

short, giving an intellectual tone to ex-metropolitan existence.

To all of which Colonel Dermont gave a smiling affirmative, persuaded that his companion was expatiating on the beauty of the highly cultivated home view displayed by the window before which they stood.

Mrs. Stephens was fortunate enough to have got George Marsh in the chair next her, and this sufficed to inspire her with a multitude of high-minded remarks on the universe in general, and the mind of men in particular. For she had heard much of the metaphysical intellectuality of the Germans, and to catch a man who had recently been a member of one of their universities during a long staying visit in the country, was something for which she felt that such a creature as herself ought to be thankful. She cared very little about the accident which had placed Miss Verepoint on the other side of him. "Poor young man! excepting Stephens and herself, she did not believe that there was a single human being in the

whole neighbourhood who knew what mind, contradistinguished from matter, meant.”— She knew that in her situation she must not over-fatigue herself, even in talking ; nevertheless, for her own sake, as well as for his, she determined to exert herself sufficiently to prevent their visit from being an intellectual blank to him.

There was no great sympathy as yet, however, between them; for exactly while she was promising him in her heart a great deal of attention, poor George was very seriously meditating upon the most effectual means of preventing her ever talking to him any more. He really was one of the very sweetest-tempered human beings in the world; yet, nevertheless, there was a slight touch of fastidiousness about him—sensitive-ness, perhaps, would be a better word. He could not, let him labour at it as earnestly as he would, obtain that degree of indifference about people whom he felt to be particularly disagreeable to him, which makes so essential a part of the pleasure of society. Where another would turn a deaf ear to

ignorance and affectation, he, poor fellow, turned a tortured one ; and frequent were his struggles with himself, and vain, alas ! as frequent, to keep his nerves tranquil, and his pulse temperate, when circumstances compelled him to listen to any modification of a Stephens, either male or female, when there was no possibility of creeping away, and listening to the chirping of a bird, or the trickling of a rill, instead.

This was an infirmity of which he was deeply conscious, and for which he was very often deeply penitent. When this sort of irritating distaste seized upon him from the persecution of mere dullness, his strenuous efforts to conquer it were often, in some degree, successful ; so far, at least, as all external demonstration went, and he would listen to a long-winded story about nothing, upon something of the same principle as a Hindoo stands upon one leg in the sun. It was a penance, and he knew extremely well that he deserved it for his sinful impatience. But the species of persecution with which Mrs. Stephens now beset him,

was of a different kind; it galled him more, and called for his forbearance less. Instead, therefore, of endeavouring to strengthen himself for endurance, he was steadfastly and sturdily plotting how he might so conduct himself as to prevent her ever attacking him in the same very particularly decided manner again.

It is likely enough that the vicinity of his silent neighbour on the other side, might have stimulated his resolution a good deal, but he was scarcely aware that it did so at all, his resolutely purposed resistance to the infliction being, as he felt, fully justified by the fact that it was not for one day, but for many, that his sufferings would be repeated, if he did not take effectual care to prevent it.

And how did he set about it, poor young man? Certainly not by answering rudely, or by looking cross—it was not in George Marsh's nature to do either—but he set himself, with all the resolution of which he was master, to persuade the lady that he was too completely abstracted in thought to hear her at all. Had he known her better,

he would have been aware that the chances were greatly in favour of her finding in this mental peculiarity an additional stimulant to her efforts towards obtaining a free interchange of opinions and sentiments ; but it was some time before she discovered how exceedingly absent that “ very clever young man, Mr. Marsh,” was. On the present occasion, when he looked vaguely at her, without uttering a word, instead of answering her question as to how he managed to pursue, in this unlettered neighbourhood, the studies in which he had doubtless “ dipped his spirit” while in Germany, she only waited a moment for his answer, and not receiving it, exclaimed, “ Ah ! Mr. Marsh, how well I understand you ! But tell me, is not this enforced abstinence exquisitely painful ? ” George looked at her with very unmeaning gentleness, but said not a word.

“ Oh ! ” she resumed ; “ how eloquent is this mute silence ! What a satire ! Mr. Marsh, you are satirical, I fear me, very satirical ! ” Mr. Marsh half closed his eyes, and sighed.

"Come, come, my dear sir," added the lady, "you must not get out of spirits about it; we really must not suffer that. Perhaps when you come to cast a more keenly analytical glance over the neighbourhood, than you may, as yet, have had leisure to do, you may find some kindred spirits amongst us, more capable of supplying the place of what you have lost, than you are, as yet, aware." Mr. Marsh turned away his head, and looked out of the window.

"I assure you, my dear sir, that both William and myself are fully capable of sympathising with you in all this; and, trust me, our best plan will be to draw together into a little knot, which, though small, may be both deep and brilliant in its intellectual researches. Some foreign correspondences may help us. We are not by any means poorly furnished in this respect, as we shall have great pleasure in proving to you. William is a corresponding member of more than one philosophical Transatlantic society. You, my dear Mr. Marsh, must have your Tutonic resources in that line, I am very

sure, and thus, though oceans roll between, and mountains rear their rugged heads to keep us asunder in the body, our winged spirits shall cleave the opposing space, and mind encounter mind across the world."

Mrs. Stephens was now so completely off, that she wanted nothing more than the continuance of Mr. Marsh's mortal part in the chair beside her, in order to persuade her that the spiritual and diviner portion of the man was near her likewise, and only rapt into silence by feelings of admiration which would not permit him to interrupt her. Before the dinner was announced, Mrs. Stephens confessed to herself that, next to her dear William, Mr. George Marsh was decidedly the most intellectual man with whom she had ever conversed.

This first attack upon his peace of mind was made under circumstances peculiarly unfavourable to poor George; for, had not Charlotte Verepoint been seated next him on the other side, no way of proving his absence of mind would have been so easy, so natural, and so pleasant, as the rising

quietly from his chair, and removing to another at the greatest possible distance. But as it was, it was as impossible for him to do so, as to have caught her up in his arms, and carried her away with him. No, happen what would, he could not leave a chair that placed him so very near to Charlotte Verepoint, and thus this very important opportunity of proving to Mrs. Stephens that it was not his intention either to talk to or listen to her was lost—a misfortune which brought many inconveniences in its train.

Meanwhile, Celestina, most strikingly attired in a wreath of large natural ivy-leaves about her head, and trimmings of the same round the bottom, sleeves, and bosom of her dress, was looking round her with a very earnest and restless eye, to discover, not exactly who she could devour, but who she could captivate, and the result was certainly not very satisfactory. Happily, however, hope leads us on, nor leaves—some of us at least—till a very late period indeed.

A strong propensity to this perennial trustfulness was one of Celestina's brightest points,

and it now led her to reason pleasantly with herself upon the extreme improbability that Colonel and Mrs. Dermont should think of inviting a large party of staying company to the house, without getting some of the officers to meet them. Perhaps there was some particular mess-dinner to-day, and they would come in the evening? At any rate, she was sure they would several of them dine there on the morrow; and, cheered by this hope, she continued to look about her with a very sprightly air, and as if she did not mind in the least the having nobody to speak to.

Julia, who had been very careful to descend to the drawing-room before any of the visitors had completed the business of dressing—in order to avoid entering a room where she might find several people to be welcomed, and a circle to be walked round—having been, as usual, kindly noticed by Miss Verepoint, found all her efforts so insufficient to conquer the painful fluttering of the heart, that she slipped out of the room again, and ensconced herself just within the

library door, from whence she knew that she could join the party as they passed to the dining-room, without being much troubled by the observation of any one.

And how did the party arrange themselves for this passage?

This is often an important manœuvre, when a set of people are brought together for a "staying visit" in the country; for it not unfrequently happens, that the order in which they move the first day, continues through each subsequent one unchanged.

This, indeed, is almost certain to be the case, if one or two of the couples chance to be particularly well pleased with this first arrangement; for somebody or other will then be sure to observe that they always like to have their own stall—because people get into their places so much quicker when they know where to go. The enjoyment, therefore, of a whole visit, may very greatly depend upon the luck or skill with which this first manœuvre is performed. The lords of the creation have, of course, considerable advantage on this occasion, as on all others

where a partner is to be chosen. The ladies, speaking generally, and setting cases of high etiquette aside, having little or nothing more in their power, than to "look beautiful with all their might."

The lamentable scarcity of gentlemen on the present occasion, left little, however, to be done by either, and that little settled itself, except in one instance, almost by necessity—that is to say, the colonel of course gave his arm to Mrs. Knight, and Mrs. Dermont of course yielded hers to Mr. Stephens. Had it been Mrs. Verepoint instead, the ghosts of all the Tremaynes would, beyond all question, have risen up between her and this new gentleman, had he been ten times married and ordained; but Mrs. Dermont thought less of the past, and more of the present, than the lady of the manor, and therefore, of course, entered the dining-room with Mr. Stephens. That the graceful Alfred should sustain the steps of the beauteous Amelia, did also seem, already, to be pretty nearly a matter of course, and thus the modest owner of Locklow Wood was the only

man left for the possession of whose arm there could be either hope or fear. Mrs. Stephens possessed a quick eye; she saw at a glance how things would go, up to the point, at least, at which the fate of her "young philosopher," as she had just called him in the last of her speeches, was to be decided; but here she felt that there might be a doubt, and a difficulty. Her own claims, as a married woman, she knew to be strong; but she also knew that Miss Verepoint was heiress to the manor of Stoke, as well as to a very influential number of acres attached to it, and she thought it just possible that Mr. Tremayne Marsh might have some long-descended, old-fashioned prejudices of class, which might make him deem it his duty to take charge of the spinster miss instead of the married lady.

"Poor fellow!" thought she, as she paused in her eloquence for a moment, "he is ignorant of English manners! If he makes this blunder to-day, he will not have courage to get right afterwards; and Miss Verepoint is so solemnly silent, that, with the peculiar

delight which he evidently takes in conversation, he will positively get moped to death if he is to sit by her every day. Besides, I detest having nothing but women near me—I must take care to manage better than that.”

In consequence of this sagacious reasoning, Mrs. Stephens held herself upon the alert for the moment when the door should open, and dinner be announced, determined to rise immediately, and, with friendly and unaffected ease, to pass her arm under that of her neighbour.

That she failed in this, was not the consequence of any negligence on her part; but, on the contrary, was solely owing to the too exclusively earnest attention which, at the critical moment, she bestowed on the door; yet she only waited to be sure that it was indeed a servant who opened it, and not Miss Drummond—a *contretemps* which struck her as being by no means improbable. But in that moment George Marsh had made the decisive movement of starting up, and saying, without any apparent symptom of

shyness whatever, "Miss Verepoint, may I have the honour of taking you to dinner?"

The colour of Mrs. Stephens was a good deal heightened when she turned round, and perceived the mischief she feared was already done. Not the least feeling of wounded vanity, however, mixed itself with her vexation, for there was at all times a reserved quietness in the manners of Miss Verepoint and Mr. Marsh towards each other, which had effectually baffled the sagacity, not of Mrs. Stephens only, but of the whole neighbourhood. There was absolutely nobody, not even Miss Verepoint's maid, who had the slightest idea how matters stood between them. No! Mrs. Stephens did not feel that her vanity was wounded, but she was a good deal vexed both on the young man's account and her own, that the conversation between them should so disagreeably be broken off. "She knew so well what it was to be seated at dinner next a being that had no soul!"

Mrs. Dermont would have been greatly shocked on any ordinary occasion, by seeing

a married lady about to pass from the drawing to the dining-room, without having a gentleman to escort her.

Alfred had winced, evidently winced uncomfortably, at the idea which had been suggested by the colonel, of asking one of the officers now and then to make up their number to twelve, and therefore she had negatived it at once, and so absolutely, as to set her son's heart, and her husband's head, quite at rest upon the subject. So now, when she observed the blank sort of look with which Mrs. Stephens threw her eyes around, as if looking for a partner, she said, with as little of form and ceremony as possible in the mistress of the Mount, "Miss Marsh, I think you must give your arm to Mrs. Stephens; it is so difficult to get an equal number of gentlemen and ladies!"

Julia's little plot succeeded perfectly, for she crossed the hall without any body's observing her, and was in the dining-room, and seated at the colonel's left-hand, nobody knew how.

Nothing very particular in the way of

general conversation occurred during the dinner. Mrs. Knight and Colonel Dermont talked just about the average quantity that people do talk when they have got nothing that they would give a straw to say or hear, to, or from, each other.

Mrs. Dermont and Mr. Stephens talked more, because the gentleman had a good deal that he liked to say about what he had done, and was going to do, to his "little place."

"I think I shall make a pretty thing of it before I have done, &c. &c. &c.," he said, and Mrs. Dermont smiled from time to time very obligingly, and replied, "that she did not doubt it."

Mrs. Stephens talked a good deal to Miss Marsh, considering she was but a woman ; for after she had eaten, which she did rather hastily, her soup, fish, and patée (which latter, she stooped forward to tell her husband was particularly well-seasoned), it occurred to her that it might prove an agreeable thing to make an intimacy with

Celestina. It might put that shy young man more at his ease if his sister were in the habit of coming to them often ;—and certainly, in her situation, it might be very useful to have a single young woman, who, towards the last, might be able to come and stay with her a few days at a time. She fortunately thought Miss Marsh very particularly plain, which removed the only objection to this sort of domestic intimacy; and, therefore, before dinner was over, they had got on prodigiously, had recommended several dishes to each other, quite affectionately, and had gone the length of saying on both sides, that they hoped they should become very good neighbours.

What passed between Miss Verepoint and Mr. Marsh, or between Miss Thorwold and Mr. Alfred Dermont, it is impossible to say, for scarcely a word was spoken by either of them above a whisper. Julia did not utter a syllable from the time she entered the room to that of her quitting it. The rest of the company were indeed so com-

pletely divided into tête-à-tête groups, as to render her doing otherwise nearly impossible.

Something had passed, however, between Alfred and Miss Thorwold during dinner, the nature of which might be guessed at by what followed. It must have been something about the sweetness of the summer air on a moonlight evening, for when the young man flew to the door upon his mother's rising, that he might open it for the ladies to pass, he stopped his mother, and begged her earnestly to let them have coffee on the lawn—and not to be *very* long before she sent to let them know that it was ready. Mrs. Dermont looked at him with rapture ; he was flushed, and certainly did look superbly handsome.

“It shall be all right, dearest,” she whispered in reply ; “the great marquee, I suppose?”

Alfred nodded his head in approval, and after an earnest glance at the retreating figure of Amelia, suffered his mother to pass, and closed the door after her.

It were long to tell all the varying events, or rather all the varying feelings of that evening. The coffee was taken under the shelter of Major Sommerton's marquee, both by those who enjoyed the *al fresco* style, and those who did not. The moon, too, shone full in upon them before they had done with it; and then Mrs. Knight confessed that she thought it very cold, and Mrs. Stephens declared that she dared not, just now, venture to run any risks, and Miss Verepoint, taking the arm of Julia, walked quietly, but decidedly, towards the house, and into it, while Mr. Marsh followed at a respectful distance; and Mr. Stephens, yielded himself unresistingly to the colonel, and listened to all he had to say about two or three of his principal farmers, merely relieving himself a little from time to time, by mentioning a few of the improvements he was going to make at his own "little place."

Alfred saw all this, and trembled, actually trembled in every joint. What! after managing every thing so beautifully, was he to be cheated out of the anticipated walk in the

shrubberies? He rushed to the side of his mother, and seizing her arm, exclaimed in accents which, perhaps, a mother only could have found intelligible. "You will not go in! You will not destroy all my promised happiness? Take the arm of Miss Marsh, for mercy's sake, mother! For pity's sake, take the arm of Miss Marsh, and ask her to walk with you in the shrubbery!—See! there is not a moment to be lost! They are both going towards the house. This is exactly the only moment that I really cared for!"

Had rheumatism, catarrh, nay, pulmonary inflammation, or even death itself, arisen in tangible form to advise Mrs. Dermont to turn a deaf ear to this petition, she would have paid no attention to this remonstrance—most assuredly, therefore, her particular dislike to "that Miss Celestina" could not avail to prevent her, but stepping forward, on the contrary, with a step most unusually quick and vigorous, she startled that young lady by very abruptly taking hold of her

arm, and exclaiming, "Indeed I cannot let you go in, my dears, till I have shown you how very pretty our oak-tree glade looks by moonlight !"

END OF VOL. I.



